VE DAY 75TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

HISTORY of WAR

PRAGUE UPRISING 1945

LAST STAND OF THE WAFFEN SS

TWO VETERAN INTERVIEWS INSIDE

Churchill: from darkest hour to crowning triumph

Veterans share their VE Day memories

Wehrmacht: stories of their final surrender

1945-2020 VICTORY

Debunking the myths of Hitler's downfall

INSIDE THE MIG-15

In the cockpit of this iconic Soviet fighter jet

FUTURE
ISSUE 080

KOREAN WAR HERO

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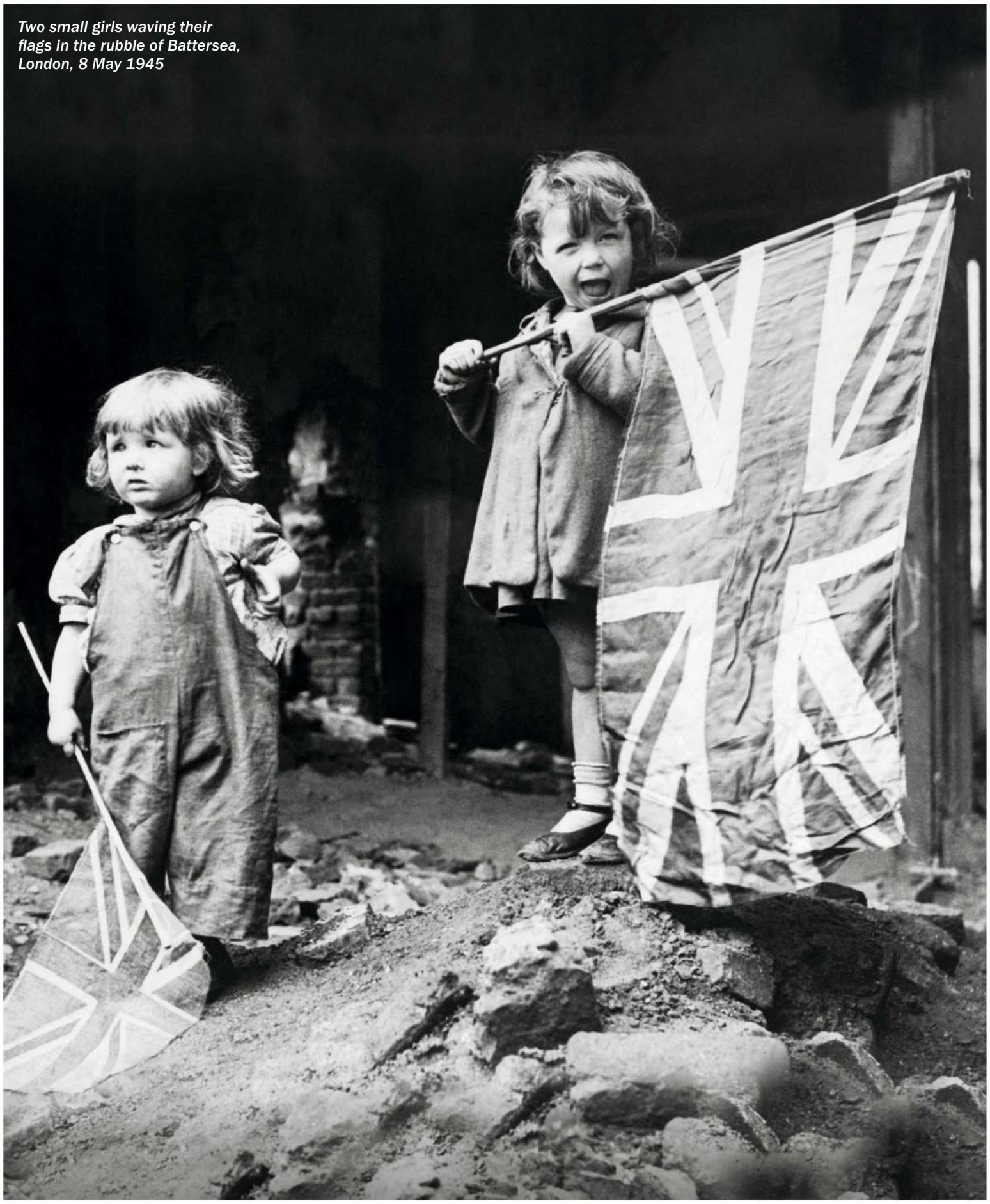

Two small girls waving their flags in the rubble of Battersea, London, 8 May 1945

Source: Wiki / PD

Welcome

Seventy-five years ago, after years of bloodshed and unprecedented destruction across the continent, the guns fell silent in Europe. With Hitler dead, and the Western and Soviet Allies converging in the heart of the Third Reich, soon German soldiers everywhere were throwing down their arms. After the jubilation of the final peace began the painful task of counting the terrible cost six years of dreadful war had inflicted on the people of Europe. However, even as celebrations began for Victory in Europe Day, thousands faced uncertain futures in a new, much changed world.

Tim Williamson
Editor-in-Chief

CONTRIBUTORS

TOM GARNER

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day, Tom spoke with two British veterans who took part in the final days of the Second World War in Europe, and witnessed celebrations across the continent (page 22).

MARK SIMNER

Mark specialises in British colonial and military history, in particular during the 19th century. Over in this issue's Great Battles he takes a closer look at the fierce Battle of Shipka Pass between Ottoman and Russian forces (page 56).

STUART HADAWAY

RAF researcher Stuart gets into the nuts and bolts of another aviation icon for this issue's Operator's Handbook. Starting on page 64 he takes a look inside the cockpit of the MiG-15 – the Soviet Union's prolific Cold War fighter jet.

MARC DESANTIS

The American Civil War was a bitter struggle that split North from South, but one Virginian officer rose to became one of the Union's most gifted generals. Over on page 44, Marc recounts the impressive career of George Henry Thomas.

VE DAY

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OPERATOR'S HANDBOOK

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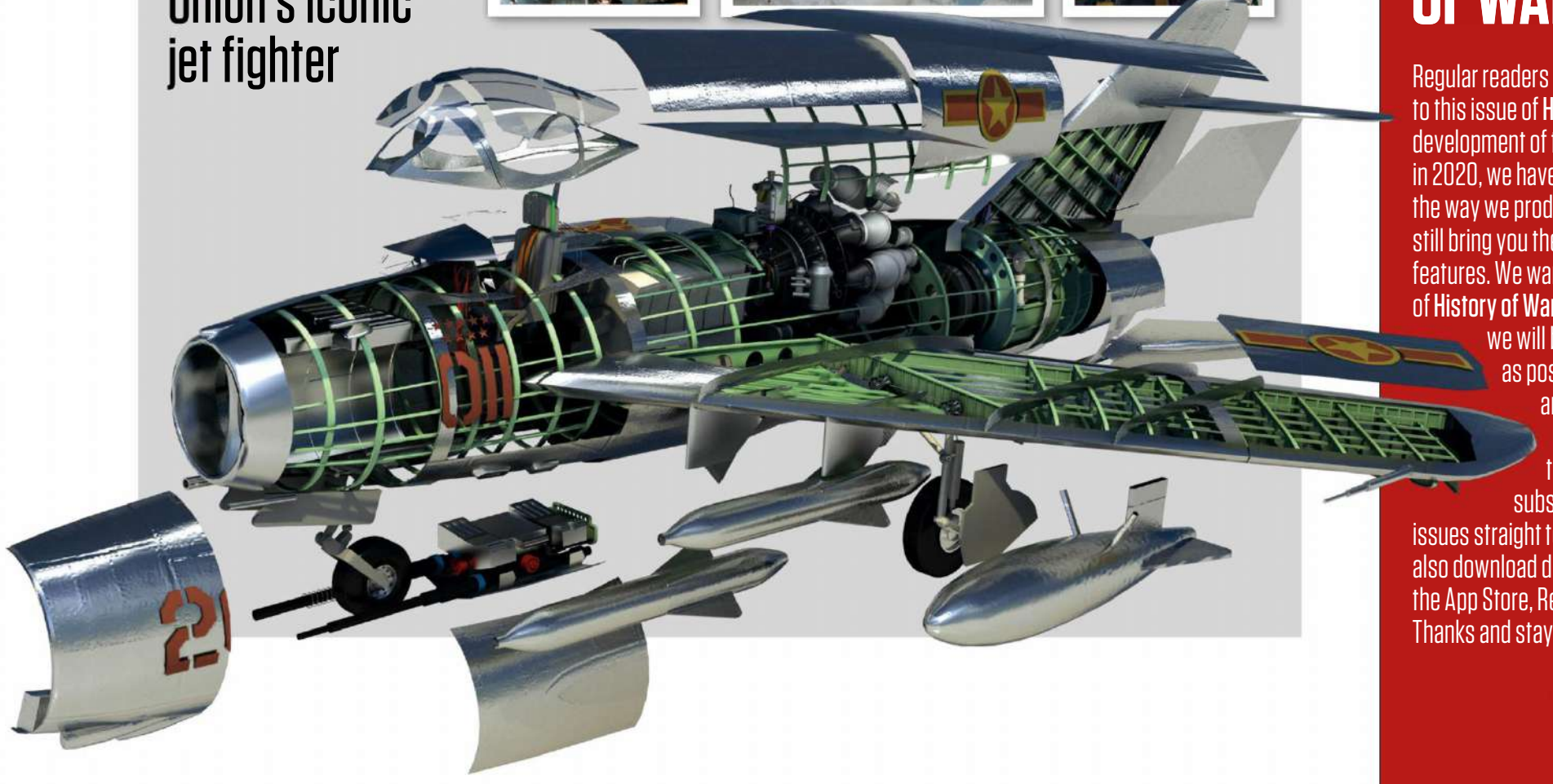

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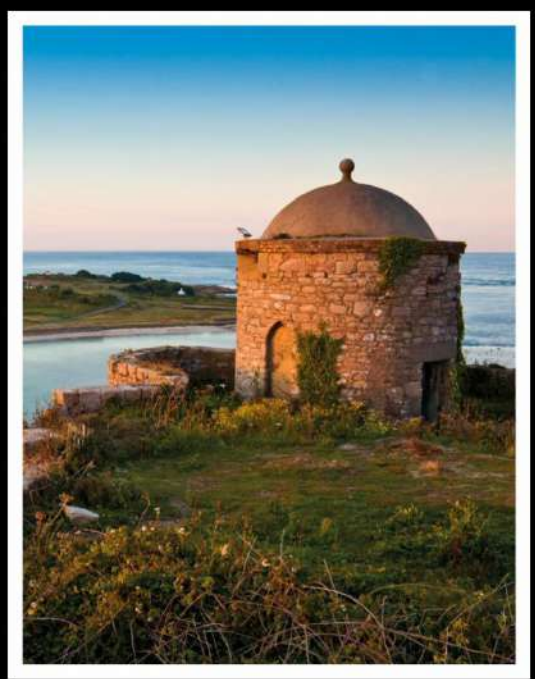

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A wonderfully preserved uniform worn during the campaign in 1916

A MESSAGE FROM THE HISTORY OF WAR TEAM

Regular readers will notice a few changes to this issue of **History of War**. Following the development of the Covid-19 pandemic earlier in 2020, we have had to temporarily change the way we produce the magazine, in order to still bring you the same quality and breadth of features. We want to thank you for your support of **History of War** during this challenging time – we will be back at full capacity as soon as possible. In the meantime if you are worried about acquiring your print issues, **turn to page 50** to find a fantastic offer on digital subscriptions, so you can download issues straight to your phone or tablet. You can also download digital issues of the magazine on the App Store, Readly and many other platforms. Thanks and stay safe!

© Alamy

WAR in FOCUS

GULF RESISTANCE

Taken: ***c. April, 1991***

A member of the Kuwaiti Resistance poses after the end of the 1990-91 Gulf War, during which Iraqi forces invaded and occupied its diminutive southern neighbour. Despite being heavily outnumbered, Kuwait's resistance network continued to oppose the Iraqi occupation, through disruption to infrastructure and the oil industry, and direct military attack.

WAR in FOCUS

THE SEAT OF POWER

Taken: ***16 July, 1945***

During a visit to Berlin, prime minister Winston Churchill inspects the remains of Hitler's, Führerbunker, the site of the dictator's suicide just three months previous. As well as a tour of the Chancellery, Churchill and his entourage, which included Anthony Eden, also visited the Tiergarten, the Reichstag and other iconic but desolated sites around the German capital.

© Getty

TIMELINE OF THE...

END OF WWII IN EUROPE

The last four weeks of the war in the West is a dramatic time of bloody battles, horrific discoveries, surrenders and the deaths of Allied and Axis leaders

© Alamy

April-May 1945

MASS SURRENDER OF AXIS FORCES

Axis troops capitulate en masse to Allied forces with approximately 1,500,000 surrendering. This huge body of soldiers leads US forces to establish a group of 19 Rheinwiesenlager camps in the Western Allied-occupied part of Germany to hold prisoners. By September 1945 these numbers grow to almost two million inmates.

German POWs pictured at a makeshift camp at Remagen. In many camps like this, the prisoners have no shelter and an estimated 3,000-6,000 die in the poor conditions

© Alamy

12 April 1945

DEATH OF ROOSEVELT

Roosevelt dies in office of a cerebral haemorrhage, less than three months into his record-breaking fourth term as US president. He is succeeded by Vice-President Harry S. Truman while Winston Churchill eulogises him in the House of Commons as "the greatest American friend we have ever known, and the greatest champion of freedom".

© Alamy

Roosevelt sits for a watercolour portrait by Elizabeth Shoumatoff on 12 April but dies shortly after the lunch of the first sitting. Shoumatoff finishes the painting in his memory but the unfinished version is the most famous

15 April 1945

BERGEN-BELSEN LIBERATED 01

Bergen-Belsen concentration camp is liberated by British troops. The soldiers discover thousands of unburied bodies and approximately 60,000 starving and mortally ill prisoners in horrific conditions. Despite strenuous attempts by the British to aid survivors, almost 14,000 prisoners die after their liberation.

British soldiers force SS guards of Bergen-Belsen to carry the bodies of murdered Holocaust victims to mass graves. Surviving children can be seen looking on in the background

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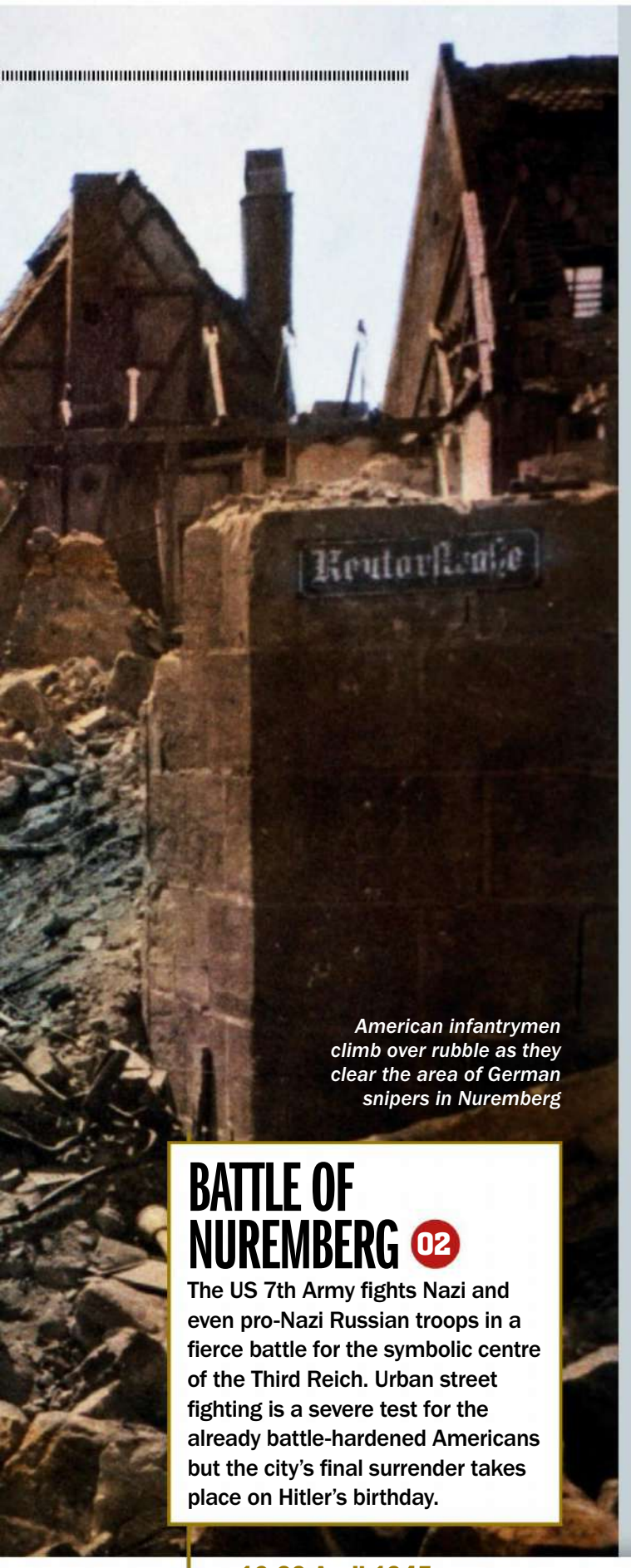


American infantrymen climb over rubble as they clear the area of German snipers in Nuremberg

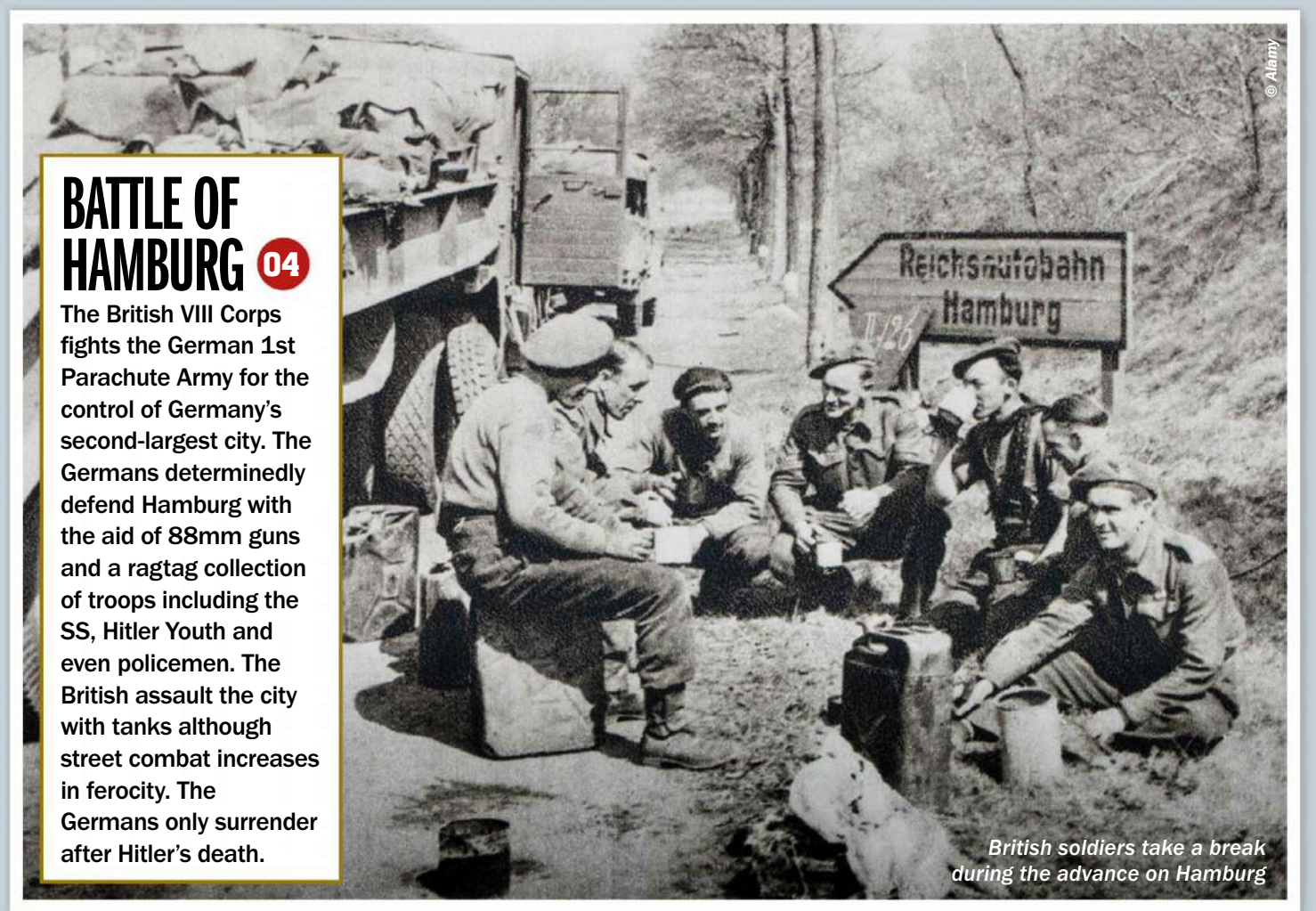
BATTLE OF NUREMBERG 02

The US 7th Army fights Nazi and even pro-Nazi Russian troops in a fierce battle for the symbolic centre of the Third Reich. Urban street fighting is a severe test for the already battle-hardened Americans but the city's final surrender takes place on Hitler's birthday.

16-20 April 1945

BATTLE OF HAMBURG 04

The British VIII Corps fights the German 1st Parachute Army for the control of Germany's second-largest city. The Germans determinedly defend Hamburg with the aid of 88mm guns and a ragtag collection of troops including the SS, Hitler Youth and even policemen. The British assault the city with tanks although street combat increases in ferocity. The Germans only surrender after Hitler's death.



© Alamy

British soldiers take a break during the advance on Hamburg

18 April-3 May 1945

LIBERATION OF DACHAU 05

American forces liberate approximately 32,000 prisoners at Dachau concentration camp and its sub-camps. They find more than 30 rail trucks filled with bodies and in the coming days rescue thousands more prisoners that have been forced onto a death march. Enraged American soldiers and prisoners kill some of the SS guards after the liberation.

US Army medics discover a rail truck filled with the bodies of murdered prisoners at Dachau

© Alamy

29 April 1945

16 April-2 May 1945

BATTLE OF BERLIN 03

Soviet forces commit millions of troops to seize the German capital from Nazi control in a battle that defines the end of the war in Europe. The Western Allies contribute with heavy aerial bombing but Dwight D. Eisenhower does not want Allied troops under his command to suffer unnecessary casualties in territory that is already designated as a Soviet sphere of influence.

Soviet fighter-bombers fly over Berlin

© Alamy

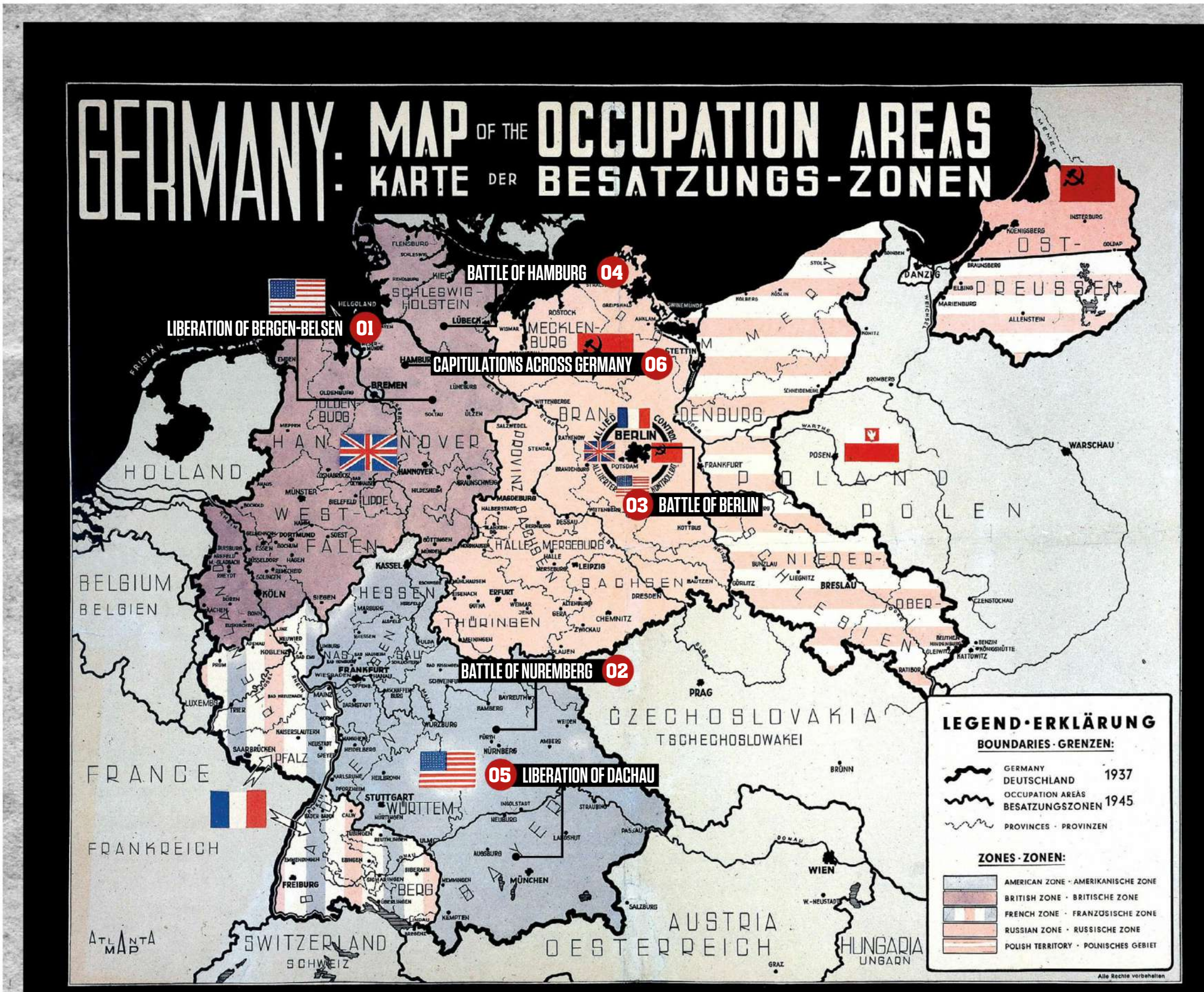
25-27 April 1945

GERMAN FORCES LEAVE FINLAND

Finnish forces confirm that the Wehrmacht has left the northwest corner of Finnish Lapland. This marks the end of three conflicts that Finland has fought within WWII: the Winter and Continuation Wars against the Soviet Union and the Lapland War against the Nazis.

Finnish soldiers raise the national flag at the three-country cairn between Finland, Norway and Sweden, 27 April 1945

Source: Wiki / Military Museum of Finland



28 April 1945

DEATH OF MUSSOLINI

Benito Mussolini and his mistress Claretta Petacci are shot by Italian partisans at Giulino, Lombardy, after being captured while trying to escape to Switzerland. Their bodies are then strung up and publicly displayed at the Piazzale Loreto in Milan.

© Alamy

The bodies of Mussolini (second from left), Claretta Petacci (centre) and other executed fascists hang from meat hooks at a half-built petrol station

30 April 1945

DEATH OF HITLER

Adolf Hitler commits suicide with his wife of one day, Eva Braun, in the Führerbunker. Their bodies are immediately burned in the garden behind the Reich Chancellery while Admiral Karl Dönitz succeeds Hitler as German president and supreme commander of Germany's armed forces.

American GIs read about Hitler's demise in the military newspaper Stars And Stripes *while on leave in Paris*

© Getty

2 May 1945

SURRENDER OF CASERTA

The capitulation of all German forces in Italy comes into effect and ends the Italian Campaign. The surrender has already been formalised on 29 April and is signed at the Royal Palace of Caserta in Campania.

The chaplain-colonel of the US Mountain Division leads American soldiers in prayer at Torboli following the unconditional surrender of German forces in Italy

© Alamy

Military personnel and civilians celebrate VE Day in London, 8 May 1945

© Getty

VE DAY

The definitive text of the German unconditional surrender is signed in Berlin in the presence of Soviet Marshal Georgy Zhukov and representatives of SHAEF. Celebrations erupt across the Western World as 'Victory in Europe Day' on 8 May. It is celebrated in the USSR on 9 May as 'Soviet Victory Day'.

© Getty

CAPITULATIONS ACROSS GERMANY 06

German forces in northwest Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands surrender to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery at Lüneberg Heath. On the same day, German forces in Bavaria surrender to the American 6th Army Group.

Montgomery reads the terms of surrender to German plenipotentiaries Admirals Gerhard Wagner and Hans-Georg von Friedeburg

PRAGUE UPRISING

The Czech Resistance attack occupying German forces in Prague. Thousands are killed as the Germans counter-attack but their progress is hampered by barricades constructed by Czech citizens. A ceasefire is signed that forces the Germans to withdraw before the Red Army liberates the city.

Czech Resistance fighters peer over barricades

© Alamy

4 May 1945 · 5-9 May 1945 · 8-9 May 1945

2 May 1945 · 7 May 1945

BERLIN FALLS

General Helmuth Weidling, the last German commander of the Berlin Defence Area, surrenders to Soviet General Vasily Chuikov. The capital of Nazi Germany has been captured by the Red Army and Soviet forces do not hand control of what becomes West Berlin to American and British forces until July 1945.

Naval officer Yevgeny Khaldei photographs a soldier raising a Soviet flag over the Reichstag in one of the most iconic images of WWII

© Alamy

UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

Under orders from Admiral Dönitz, General Alfred Jodl unconditionally surrenders all German armed forces (including those in Norway) to the Allies at SHAEF Headquarters in Reims, France. US General Walter Bedell Smith signs the surrender document on behalf of Supreme Allied Commander in Europe Dwight D. Eisenhower.

General Jodl signs the document of unconditional surrender at Reims

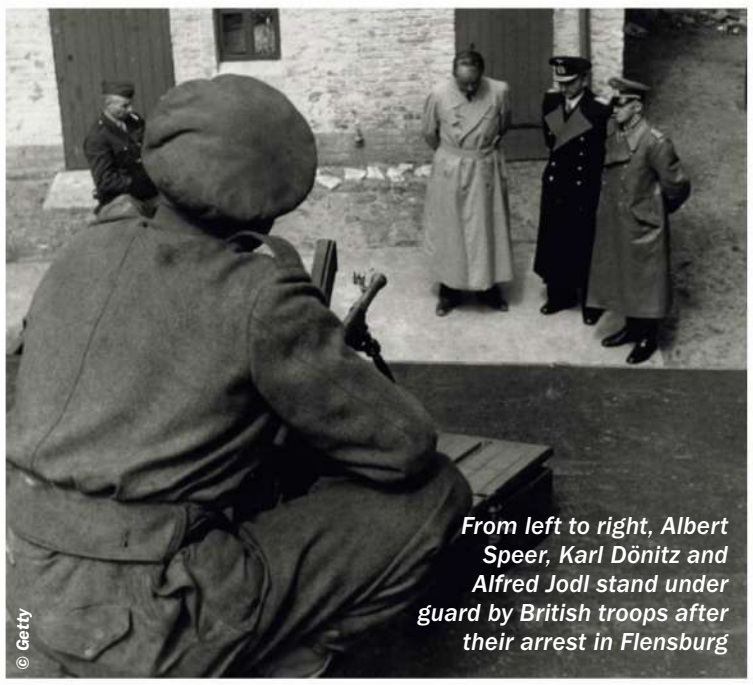
© Alamy

EUROPE ON THE BRINK OF PEACE

Key operations, battles and events in May 1945

FLENSBURG

This town in Schleswig-Holstein becomes the 'seat of government' of Admiral Dönitz, Hitler's designated successor, until his shadowy regime is dissolved on 23 May and its members arrested.



From left to right, Albert Speer, Karl Dönitz and Alfred Jodl stand under guard by British troops after their arrest in Flensburg

© Getty

LÜNEBURG HEATH

In a bravura theatrical performance, Field Marshal Montgomery accepts the surrender of German forces in Schleswig-Holstein, western Holland and Denmark on 4 May. The signing takes place in a specially erected tent.

BERLIN

The Russians accept the unconditional surrender of the German garrison on 2 May.

PRAGUE

On 1 May General Eisenhower agrees with the Russians to limit any US advance into Czechoslovakia to a line from Karlsbad to Pilsen and Budejovice. This stops General Patton reaching the Czech capital on 6 May and nearly dooms the Prague uprising. Marshal Ivan Konev's Soviet troops arrive three days later.

TORGAU

In a powerful symbolic moment, American and Russian soldiers meet here, on the Elbe, on 25 April. The river forms the agreed contact line – although the Soviet occupation zone (agreed at Yalta) extends further west. Accordingly, US troops hand Torgau over to the Red Army in July.

American and Soviet troops greet each other at Torgau, on the Elbe river

Source: Wiki / Vitold Muratov

POLJANA

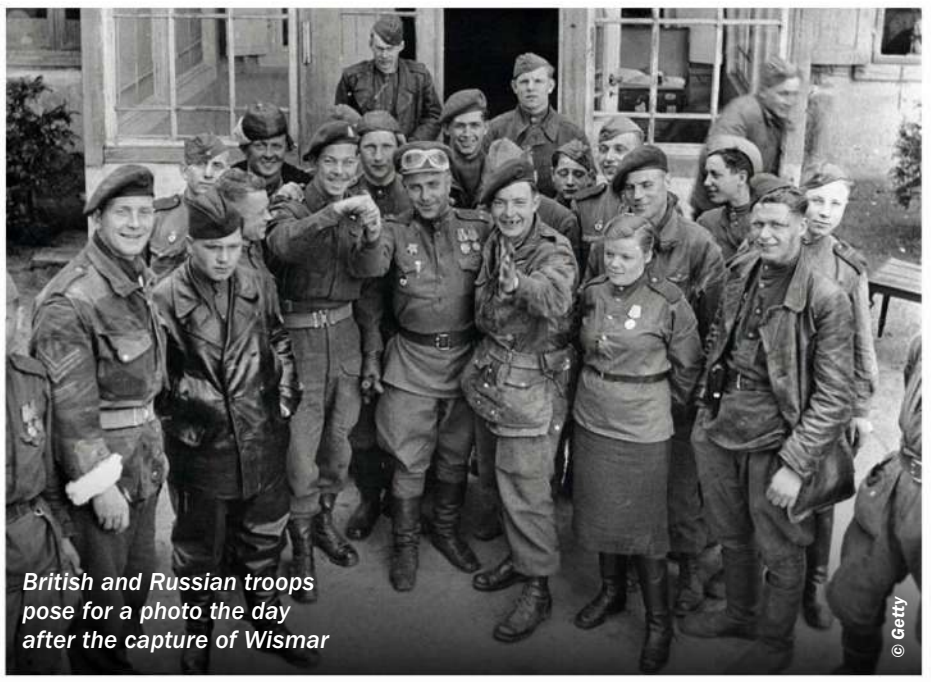
Colonel General Alexander Lohr defies the unconditional surrender agreement which takes effect on 9 May and tries to reach the British in Austria with a small army of Germans, Croatians and Chetniks. He is surrounded by Marshal Tito's forces at Poljana in northern Yugoslavia and defeated in battle on 13 May.

Alexander Lohr after his capture in Slovenia, 13 May 1945

Source: Wiki / PD

WISMAR

Soldiers from Field Marshal Montgomery's 21st Army Group seize the Baltic port on 2 May, arriving only a few hours before the advancing Russians.



British and Russian troops pose for a photo the day after the capture of Wismar

© Getty

COURLAND

German troops in the 'Courland Pocket' in northern Latvia finally surrender on 9 May.

SLIVICE

SS General Carl Pückler-Burghaus attempts to reach American lines but his forces are defeated by the Red Army in the battle of Slivice, in western Czechoslovakia, on 11-12 May.

German troops in the winter of 1944-45, in the Courland Pocket

© Alamy

CASERTA

On 29 April German troops in Italy and Austria surrender to Field Marshal Alexander at his HQ in the Royal Palace of Caserta, 25 miles north of Naples. The agreement comes into effect on 2 May.

Source: Wiki / PD US Gov Military Army

Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel signs the unconditional surrender for Germany at Karlshorst, Berlin

TWO VICTORIES, TWO SURRENDERS?

From the moment the Third Reich was finally defeated, the Soviet Union and Western Allies became divided over the formalities of the surrender, resulting in two competing dates marking the victory

The closing stages of the Second World War were a triumph for the 'Big Three' – Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union – who had done so much to defeat Hitler. They met at the Yalta summit in February 1945 to discuss the future shape of Europe. It was vital that they remained united at the war's end. Yet the celebration of Victory in Europe (VE Day) – with all its powerful symbolism – was fractured: Britain, America and Western European countries marked the event on 8 May; the Soviet Union and much of Eastern Europe, on 9 May. To some, the distinction was irrelevant; for others, it presaged the divisions of the Cold War. So how did it come about?

In the aftermath of Hitler's suicide, on 30 April 1945, everyone hoped for a speedy end to the war. There were a succession of local surrenders. On 2 May the German garrison in Berlin surrendered to the Russians; the Wehrmacht's forces in Italy laid down their arms to the British. On 4 May Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery accepted the unconditional

The first unconditional surrender at Rheims on 7 May 1945 (General Jodl, centre foreground, signs for the Germans; General Bedell Smith, centre middle ground, for the Allies)

© Alamy

© Alamy

***Left:** The second unconditional surrender at Karlshorst, in the suburbs of Berlin, on 8 May (the delayed ceremony was only completed after midnight on 9 May); Marshal Georgi Zhukov signs for the Soviet Union*

surrender of all troops in Schleswig-Holstein, western Holland and Denmark at Lüneburg Heath, in northern Germany.

Substantial numbers of German soldiers remained in Norway, Czechoslovakia, on the Hel Peninsula (in present-day northern Poland) and in the 'Courland Pocket' in Latvia. But on 6 May the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) at Rheims was confident that a final surrender would take place in a schoolhouse in the city early the following morning.

The fly in the ointment was the shadowy regime set up by Hitler's nominated successor, Admiral Karl Dönitz, at Flensburg in northern Germany. It exercised little real power, but its very presence divided the Allies. The British saw advantages in working with this fledgling government, the Americans tolerated its existence, while the Russians wanted nothing to do with it whatsoever.

SHAEF's commander, General Dwight Eisenhower, had always been fair in his dealings with the Soviet Union. But by negotiating directly with Dönitz's government, he risked alienating the Russians. Matters were complicated by cumbersome communication between the Allied powers. Messages from SHAEF were first transmitted to the US Military Mission in Moscow, and only then to the Soviet High Command. Eisenhower believed all sides simply wanted a rapid cessation of hostilities. He was in for a shock.

At 2.41am on 7 May, SHAEF oversaw a German unconditional surrender at Rheims. General Alfred Jodl signed on behalf of Dönitz's government, General Bedell Smith represented SHAEF and Major General Ivan Susloparov signed on behalf of the Soviet Union. At this stage, Susloparov had not received confirmation from the Soviet High Command. Unsure what to do, he ratified the agreement anyway.

Then came a bombshell. The Russians would not accept it. ("Who the hell is this famous Russian general?" Stalin had roared). They demanded changes to the original treaty. They insisted the signing should be made by the German High Command, not the Dönitz government. Also, they wanted it to take place in Berlin, with the Soviet Union represented by its foremost commander, Marshal Georgi Zhukov.

Chaos ensued. John Counsell – who helped draft the agreement – caught the moment, "Major General Susloparov emerged from behind a screen. Gone was the jocund figure with whom we had been exchanging toasts only minutes earlier. His face was now drained of all colour, his eyes were expressionless. He passed us into the night, to a fate which we could only guess at."

To his credit, General Eisenhower stepped into the breach. A news embargo was then imposed. A second signing was agreed upon – this time at Karlshorst, in the suburbs of Berlin. The Western Allies celebrated VE Day on 8 May. That evening, another unconditional surrender took place, with Zhukov representing the Russians, Field Marshal Keitel the Germans and Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder who was standing in for SHAEF.

However, the second signing was delayed, and only took place after midnight on 9 May – the day the Soviet Union chose to honour its victory. Some praised this last-ditch retrieval of Allied relations, but the seeds of Cold War estrangement had been sown.

DEBUNKING HITLER'S SURVIVAL

Q&A WITH LUKE DALY-GROVES

The author and historian reveals how the leader of the Third Reich definitively met his end among the ruins of his genocidal regime

The famous headline announcing Hitler's death for the American military newspaper The Stars And Stripes, *2 May 1945*

Although the war in Europe did not officially end until 8 May 1945, the death of Adolf Hitler a week before dramatically brought about its swift conclusion. Hitler's suicide in his own specially-built bunker in Berlin made international headlines but it was almost immediately accompanied by rumours of his escape.

Luke Daly-Groves has extensively studied Hitler's last days and survival theories in his book *Hitler's Death: The Case Against Conspiracy*. He discusses the overwhelming evidence for the Führer's demise, Joseph Stalin's role as the first conspirator and some of the wilder claims about the tyrant's alleged whereabouts.

How did Hitler commit suicide and what then happened to his body?

Historians can't agree exactly how Hitler committed suicide. His method of death became a Cold War political issue as the Soviets insisted he took poison (which was considered a cowardly death) but Western historians were convinced he shot himself. Some argue he did both, but I find this unconvincing due to how quick cyanide acts. From the evidence I've seen, I'm certain that he shot himself. All the key eyewitnesses concur due

© Alamy

to the blood on his corpse and on post-war photographs you can see blood splattered on his sofa. Hitler's body was doused in petrol and set on fire outside the bunker.

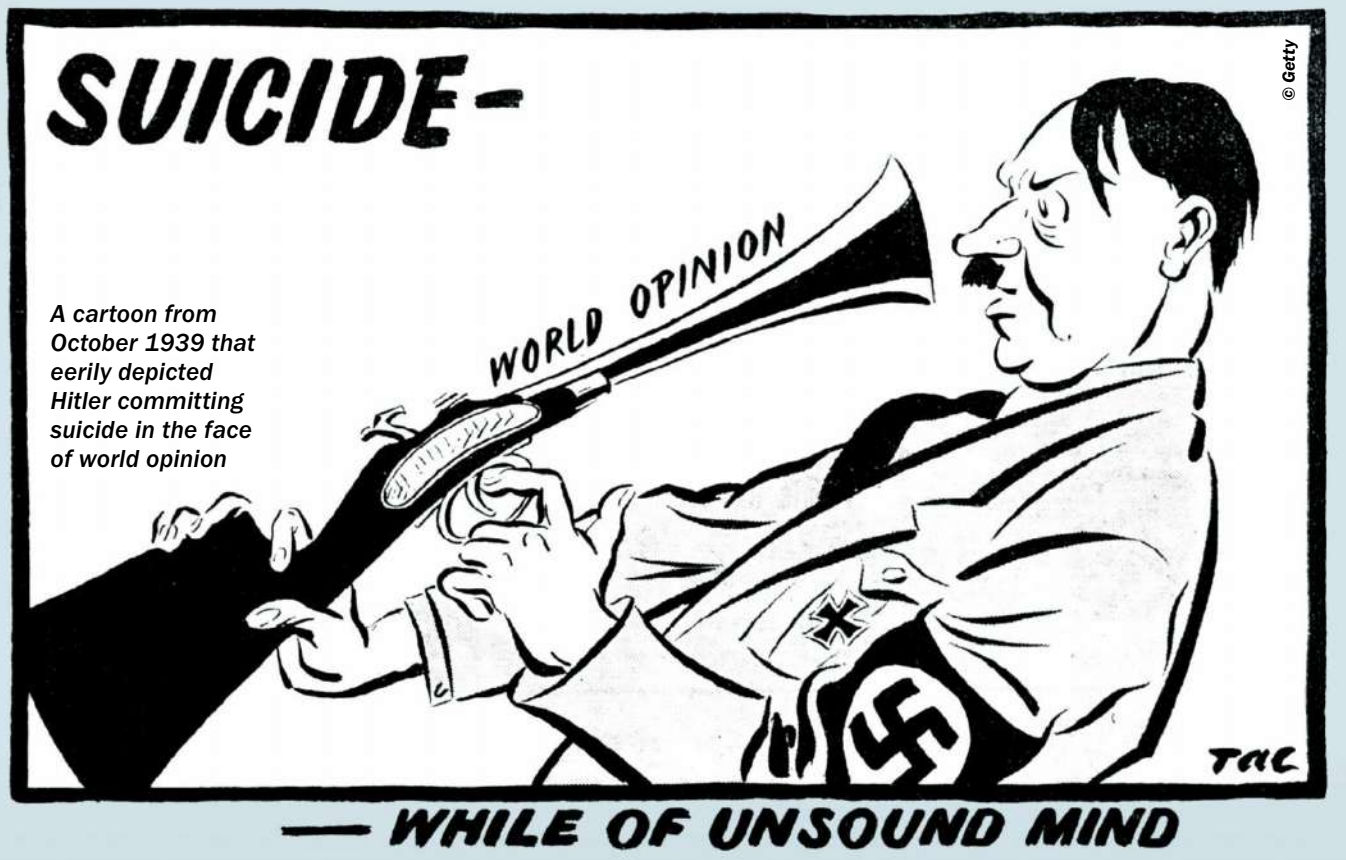
After the war, the Soviets found all that was left of him. They sent his jaw and teeth to Moscow. Eventually, in 1970, they incinerated the rest of his remains, scattering them in the river Ehle near Biederitz in Germany.

What happened when the Soviets entered the Führerbunker and confirmed that Hitler was dead?

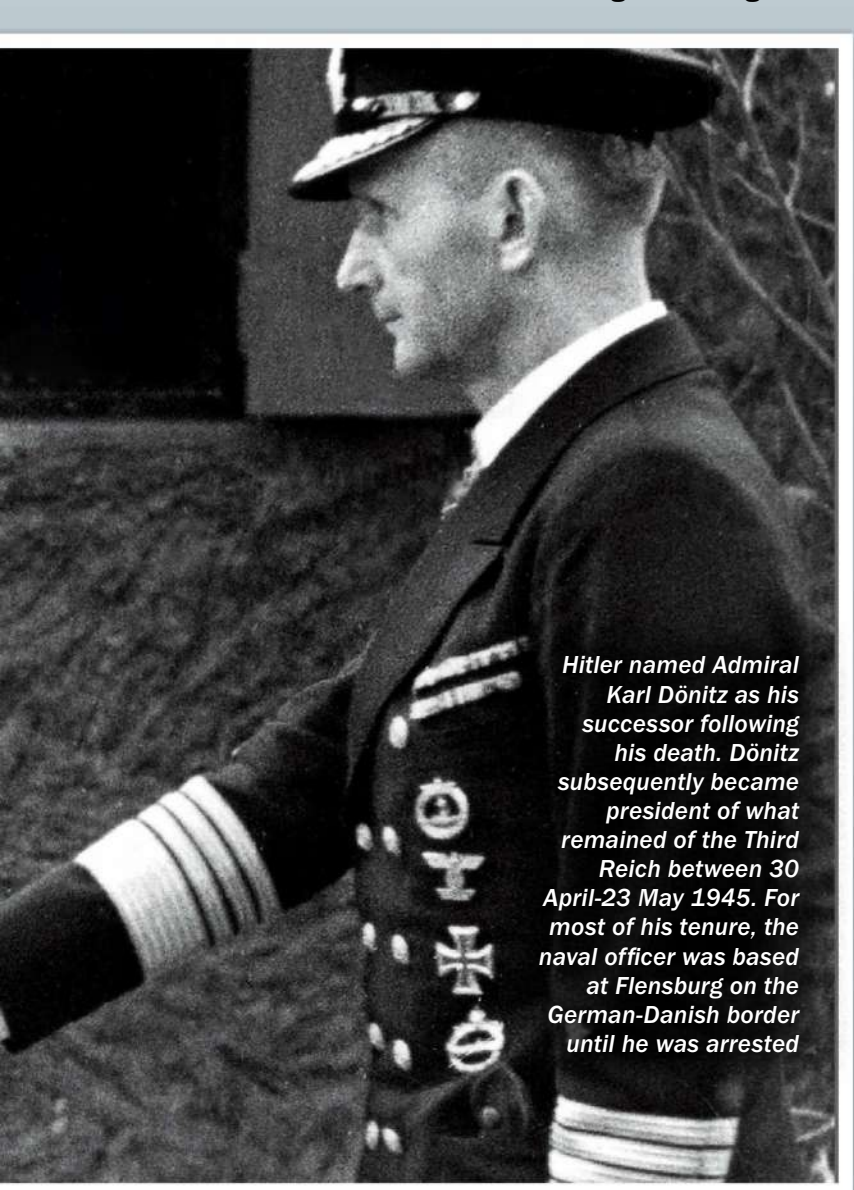
The first Soviets to enter were a group of women from the medical corps who stole lingerie belonging to Hitler's wife, Eva. This set the semi-farcical tone for what happened next. When the SMERSH unit who had been ordered to find Hitler's body arrived, the corpses of Hitler and Eva were briefly exhumed and then reburied. This is because the Soviets initially mistook a poor lookalike corpse to be the Führer himself. Realising their mistake, the actual corpses were re-exhumed and sent for autopsy. They were convincingly identified by dental assistant Käthe Heusermann and dental technician Fritz Echtmann who had both worked on Hitler's teeth.

To what extent did Stalin begin conspiracy theories that Hitler had escaped?

The international explosion of Hitler survival rumours that began in the summer of 1945 can be largely blamed on Stalin. Prior to Stalin's statement in June 1945 that Hitler was still alive – and his later claim at the Potsdam conference that Hitler could have escaped to Spain or Argentina – there is little evidence of British or American intelligence organisations being swamped by such rumours. There may have been some local rumblings on the ground in Germany as the situation after such a catastrophic war was understandably confused. However, it is only after Stalin's statements that the intelligence files filled up with escape rumours. Most historians now agree that Stalin likely had political reasons to make these false claims, but modern conspiracy theorists still reproduce them as fact.



A cartoon from October 1939 that eerily depicted Hitler committing suicide in the face of world opinion



Hitler named Admiral Karl Dönitz as his successor following his death. Dönitz subsequently became president of what remained of the Third Reich between 30 April-23 May 1945. For most of his tenure, the naval officer was based at Flensburg on the German-Danish border until he was arrested

What are some of the most outlandish theories about Hitler's survival?

To me, they are all outlandish but it has become something of a sport for historians to mention the silliest ones. Some of the strangest I have read describe Hitler disguised as a monk and a woman!

A particularly daft one is that he converted to Islam in Egypt. There were several 'sightings' in America of poor people who looked a little bit like Hitler or sounded like him. In 1948, two FBI agents boarded a train near New Orleans to investigate a claim that Hitler and Eva were on board, but the two individuals looked nothing like them. What is important to note about such theories is that they all strengthen the evidence for Hitler's suicide because they were investigated and disproved by numerous intelligence organisations.

What is the scientific proof that Hitler died on 30 April 1945?

Hitler had very unique dental work due to the poor state of his teeth, which was the product of his liking for sugary treats. Consequently, two dentists who had worked on his teeth had no trouble identifying them in 1945. In the 1970s, forensic scientist Reidar Sognnaes published a detailed article comparing recently published Soviet evidence with Hitler's medical information in American archives. He convincingly confirmed that the Soviets did in fact find Hitler. In 2018, Professor Philippe Charlier published a modern forensic analysis of Hitler's teeth reconfirming, with detailed images, that they are in fact Hitler's. They even show signs of vegetarianism. The Soviets bolstered this evidence in 1946 when they tested the blood on Hitler's sofa and confirmed it was his type.

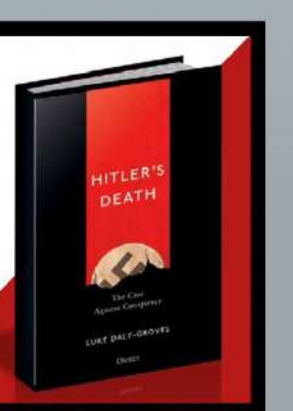
What would have happened to Hitler if he had been captured alive by the Soviets?

During my research I haven't come across any plans detailing what the Soviets would like to have done with Hitler had they captured him alive. It certainly wouldn't have been pleasant. Hitler knew and feared this. Several eyewitnesses in the bunker recall him expressing horror at the idea of being captured by the Russians and potentially displayed in a 'monkey cage' in Moscow. He implicitly refers to this in his private will, essentially a lengthy suicide note, in which he says that both him and Eva "in order to escape the disgrace of deposition or capitulation – choose death".

What is it about Hitler's final days that are so compelling for historians?

Hitler's last days represent a grim, unique moment in world history when an entire world came to an end and so much rested on the shoulders of one sick, evil man. Studying them reveals much about the Nazi regime, Hitler's world view and what all that stood for. Magda Goebbels was willing to murder her children because she did not wish them to live in a world without Nazism. It's easy to see how people with such opinions could support the Holocaust. Studying the lives of those in the bunker helps us to better understand Nazism and to help make sure it doesn't happen again. These people weren't supernatural-style monsters – they were human beings with terrible ideas, capable of love and friendship but also despicable evil. It is that which makes studying Hitler's last days so interesting. It reveals much about the evil human beings are capable of.

Hitler's Death: The Case Against Conspiracy **by Luke Daly-Groves is published by Osprey Publishing. To purchase a copy visit: www.ospreypublishing.com**



LEADERS AND HEROES

Civil and military heroes played their vital role in bringing about the final victory over Nazi Germany

MARSHAL KONSTANTIN ROKOSSOVSKY

"THE GERMAN ARMY IS A MACHINE – AND MACHINES CAN BE BROKEN"

1896-1968 *POLAND*

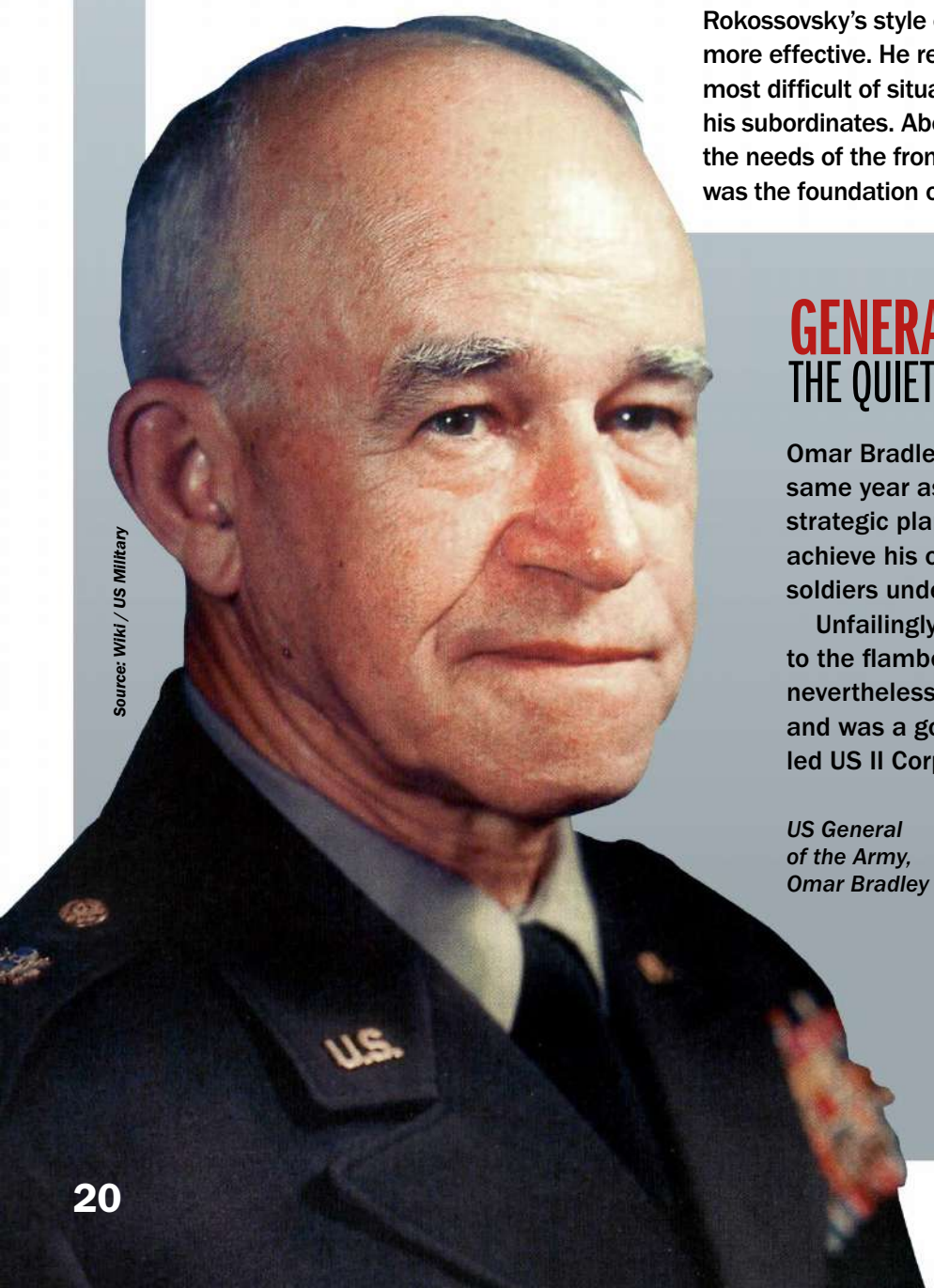
Konstantin Rokossovsky began his military career as an outstanding Red Army cavalry officer, twice honoured with the Order of the Red Banner. An innovative thinker, he went on to study at the Frunze Military Academy. In the military purges of 1937, Rokossovsky's Polish origins aroused suspicion and he was arrested. He refused to sign a confession that he knew was false, despite beatings and mock executions, and was released three years later.

Rokossovsky's World War II record was exceptional. In 1941 he bravely led the 16th Army in its heroic defence of Moscow. The following year, as commander of the Don Front, he helped mastermind Operation Uranus, cutting off the German 6th Army at Stalingrad. In July 1943 he held the northern salient during the battle of Kursk, preventing a breakthrough by General Model's 9th Army. His greatest achievement came in the summer of 1944 with the planning and execution of Operation Bagration, which destroyed the Wehrmacht's Army Group Centre.

A moment of controversy occurred in August 1944, when – entrenched on the River Vistula – Rokossovsky claimed that over-extended supply lines prevented him assisting the Warsaw Uprising. In reality, Stalin – distrustful of the Polish resistance fighters – may have ordered him not to give any military support. He finished the war fighting in northern Germany, linking up with the British forces of Field Marshal Montgomery at Wismar on 2 May 1945.

Marshals Rokossovsky and Georgi Zhukov led the Victory Parade on Red Square (on 22 June 1945). Zhukov is usually celebrated as the Soviet Union's greatest World War II commander but Rokossovsky's style of leadership was more effective. He remained calm in the most difficult of situations and did not bully his subordinates. Above all, he never forgot the needs of the frontline soldier – and that was the foundation of his success.

© Getty



Source: Wiki / US Military

GENERAL OF THE ARMY OMAR BRADLEY

THE QUIET AMERICAN WHO SAVED LIVES 1893-1981 *USA*

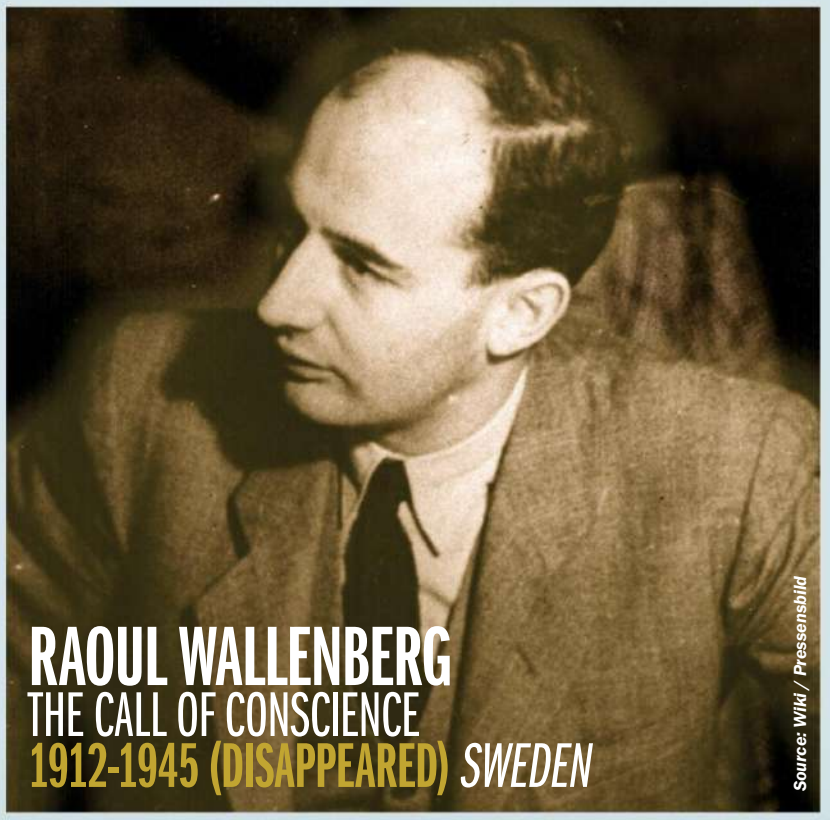
Omar Bradley graduated from West Point in the same year as Dwight Eisenhower. He was a superb strategic planner, whose prime concern was to achieve his objectives with minimum losses for the soldiers under his command.

Unfailingly polite and soft-spoken – in contrast to the flamboyant George Patton – he was nevertheless capable of making tough decisions and was a good judge of character. In 1943 he led US II Corps in Tunisia and Sicily; the following year, he was commander of all American forces in Normandy. He oversaw the crossing of the Rhine in March 1945 and on 25 April linked up with Soviet Marshal Konev on the River Elbe.

A compassionate commander, nicknamed 'the GI's General', Bradley dissuaded General Eisenhower from making a dash on Berlin. He reckoned it would cost 100,000 American casualties, far too many, he believed, for "a prestige objective". He was right.

US General of the Army, Omar Bradley

"BRADLEY DISSUADED GENERAL EISENHOWER FROM MAKING A DASH ON BERLIN. HE RECKONED IT WOULD COST 100,000 AMERICAN CASUALTIES, FAR TOO MANY, HE BELIEVED, FOR 'A PRESTIGE OBJECTIVE'"



Source: Wiki / Pressensbild

RAOUL WALLENBERG
THE CALL OF CONSCIENCE
1912-1945 (DISAPPEARED) *SWEDEN*

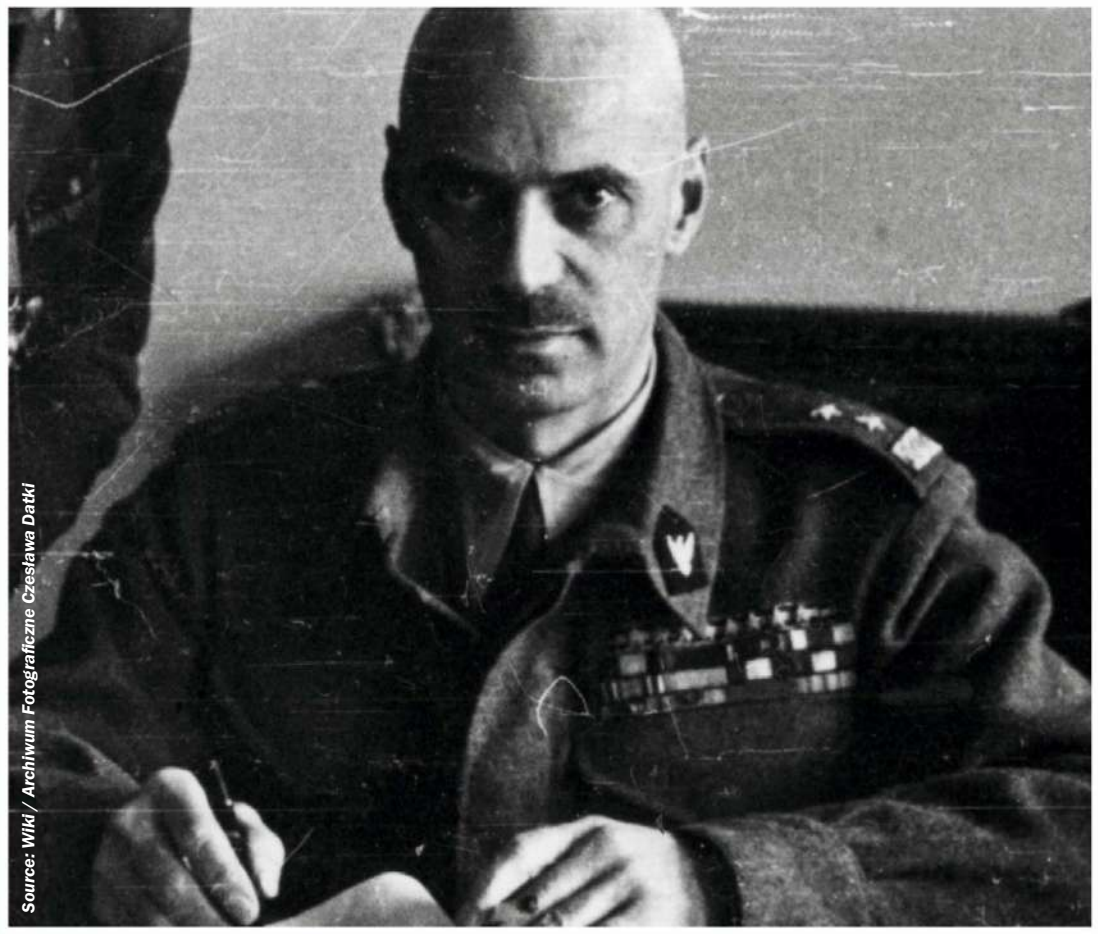
Leadership can be seen on the field of battle, or in international statecraft. It also resides in the conscience of every individual. In the summer of 1944, Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, his country's special envoy to Budapest, proved the truth of this, doing all he could to save the lives of Hungarian Jews being sent to Auschwitz, in the teeth of opposition from Hungarian fascists (the 'Red Arrow' party) and SS commander Adolf Eichmann. Wallenberg handed out protective passes to Jews about to be deported – on one occasion clambering aboard a train about to leave for the death camps – and sheltered others in buildings designated Swedish territory. He continued his efforts as the Red Army fought for control of the Hungarian capital.

There is much speculation about Wallenberg's eventual fate. He was arrested by Soviet forces in Hungary on 17 January 1945. He may have been executed in a Moscow prison two years later, for reasons that are still unclear. But one thing is certain – he stepped up and did the right thing, regardless of the risks. Thousands of Jewish lives were saved as a result.

GENERAL WLADYSLAW ANDERS
AN INDOMITABLE WILL TO RESIST 1892-1970 *POLAND*

If Homer's *Odyssey* had been set in World War II, General Wladyslaw Anders would have taken a starring role. A cavalry brigade commander at the beginning of World War II, Anders fought courageously against the Germans, only to be captured by the Russians, who had invaded Poland from the east. He spent the next 20 months in a Moscow prison, but was released in the summer of 1941, after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, and ordered to raise an army from those Poles languishing in Stalin's gulags. In March 1942 Churchill intervened, gaining permission for Anders and his followers to leave the Soviet Union and undertake a remarkable journey south. Marching through Iran, Iraq, British-held Palestine and Egypt, Anders and his soldiers then fought in Italy as the Polish II Corps. Here they gained a stunning revenge against the Germans, storming the summit of Monte Cassino in May 1944.

General Anders was a bitter opponent of the Yalta summit of February 1945 – rightly seeing it as a betrayal of Poland. The remarkable heroism of his army should never be forgotten.



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MARSHAL TITO
INVINCIBLE PARTISAN LEADER
1892-1980 *CROATIA*

In the summer of 1941 Germany launched a blitzkrieg invasion of Yugoslavia. When organised resistance quickly collapsed, communist leader Josip Broz, known as 'Tito', took command of a guerrilla movement. That autumn Tito's partisans tied up vital Wehrmacht divisions that could have been used in the battle for Moscow. The Germans were never able to subdue him, either by conventional military operations or assassination attempts (including an airborne attack on his mountain headquarters at Drvar). At the Teheran summit in November 1943, the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union all pledged their support.

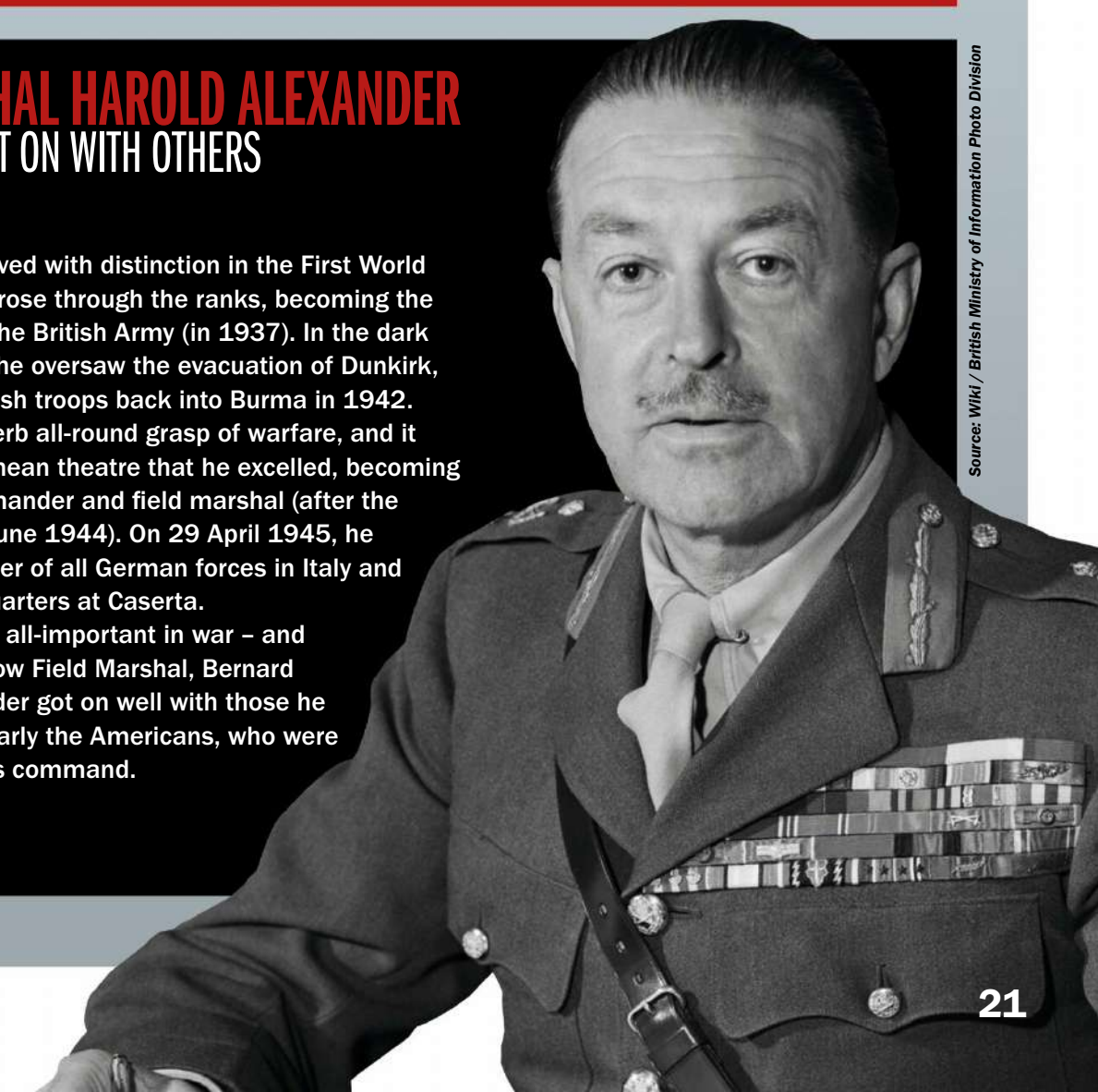
Fiercely independent, Tito once sat down at an Allied conference with five machine-gunners in attendance. In May 1945 there was concern when his forces briefly occupied Trieste, in the northeastern corner of Italy – but everyone recognised his remarkable contribution to the defeat of Adolf Hitler.

FIELD MARSHAL HAROLD ALEXANDER
AN ABILITY TO GET ON WITH OTHERS
1891-1969

Harold Alexander served with distinction in the First World War, and afterwards rose through the ranks, becoming the youngest general in the British Army (in 1937). In the dark days of World War II he oversaw the evacuation of Dunkirk, in 1940, and led British troops back into Burma in 1942. Alexander had a superb all-round grasp of warfare, and it was in the Mediterranean theatre that he excelled, becoming supreme allied commander and field marshal (after the capture of Rome in June 1944). On 29 April 1945, he accepted the surrender of all German forces in Italy and Austria at his headquarters at Caserta.

Unity of purpose is all-important in war – and in contrast to his fellow Field Marshal, Bernard Montgomery, Alexander got on well with those he worked with, particularly the Americans, who were happy to be under his command.

Field Marshal Sir Harold Alexander in 1945



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VE DAY

JOURNEYS TO VICTORY

Albert Selby after he was medically discharged from the army, 1945

© Albert Selby

Fred Duffield pictured at Osnabrück, April 1945

© Fred Duffield

Two British veterans recall how their fighting experiences led to the memorable end of WWII in Europe

WORDS **TOM GARNER**

After almost six years of the bloodiest conflict ever fought, the guns fell silent in Europe on 8 May 1945. The continent had been utterly devastated with countless homes and cities destroyed. Whole countries had been brought to their knees and millions of lives had been lost or irreparably damaged. The intense pain the conflict had inflicted was finally at an end and the war's conclusion triggered mass celebrations across the world.

Out of the millions who remembered that day were two men who contributed to the Allied victory. Albert Selby and Fred Duffield were both soldiers in the British Army who had extensively fought in Europe from 1944. However, on 8 May 1945 they had very different experiences of VE Day. Seventy-five years on, they recall the battles that led to the war's conclusion, the comrades they lost and the sober recognition that VE Day was not the end of WWII.

British infantrymen station themselves behind a wall during a fight with the German rear-guard in Normandy, June 1944

© Getty

"SONNY, YOU KNOW THE SHELTER YOU'RE IN? THERE'S A BIG BOMB DOWN THE SIDE OF IT"

"THOSE LEFT BEHIND"

Albert Selby fought on D-Day and advanced through Western Europe before a serious wound led to him celebrating VE Day at home

During WWII, Birmingham was Britain's third most-bombed city after London and Liverpool although the sufferings of neighbouring Coventry became better known. From August 1940, 1,852 tons of bombs were dropped on the city, which was an important industrial and manufacturing centre. Over 2,200 people were killed and many thousands more injured along with the destruction of innumerable buildings. One 'Brummie' who survived the maelstrom was a young worker called Albert Selby who was soon to pass from one kind of fire into another when he was conscripted into the British Army.

A blitzed city

Born in December 1923, Selby's first experiences of WWII involved trying to survive the Birmingham Blitz with his family, "I was doing war work then and we had 14 hours of bombing at one point. I remember coming up our street when a woman said 'Sonny, you know the shelter you're in? There's a big bomb down the side of it'. We later stayed with an aunt nearby but during that night they bombed the BSA [Birmingham Small Arms Company]. I went straight out of trouble into trouble!"

Fifty-three workers from the BSA were killed on that occasion and during the blitz Selby also had to contend with personal tragedies and incidents, "My mother died while I was in the army. She had cancer and when there was bombing it was a bit awkward getting her down the shelter. Also, my grandad only had one leg after being in an accident. He was down the pub one time when the sirens sounded but when I got there he was lying in the gutter. He had dived down when he heard the shelling and I thought 'Bloody hell!' before I got him out. That was life then."

After attempting to volunteer for the Royal Navy and serving in the Home Guard from the age of 17, Selby was 'called up' in 1942 after he turned 18. After joining 1st Battalion, Suffolk Regiment, he was sent to Scotland and extensively trained in amphibious exercises, "We did lots of training landings on little islands but every time I went out I was seasick. I thought afterwards 'Thank God I didn't go in the navy!'"

While the troops were aware they were training for an invasion they didn't know where it might take place, "We all thought we were going to Italy. Everybody had ideas about it because we were training on hills with a Scottish officer. We eventually came down from Dumfries to Havant near Portsmouth and from there we got on barges and liners. The barges were alongside the liners and getting on them was a bit of a pain because you had all this kit and the barge was bouncing around. I realised then that I was going to France."

"Come on, Suffolks!"

1st Battalion was part of the first infantry wave to land on Sword Beach for the Normandy landings on 6 June 1944. Sword was one of the two British beaches and the easternmost location for Operation Overlord.

Stretching five miles (eight kilometres) along the Normandy coast between the seaside villages of Saint-Aubin-sur-Mer and Ouistreham, Sword was the nearest beach to Caen and responsibility for the initial landings fell to the British 3rd Infantry Division, which included the 1st Suffolks in the 8th Brigade.

Selby recalls the journey across the English Channel and approaching the beach, "We played cards on board the ship. Oddly enough, I wasn't seasick on this occasion but I probably

Firefighters attend the scene of destroyed buildings in Birmingham, April 1941

Source: Wiki / PD

didn't know what was coming! I looked out about half a mile from the beach and saw one of our ships sink. Whether it was a mine or not I don't know but I couldn't imagine it was anything else."

When the landing vessels approached Sword, the soldiers were exhorted into battle under fire, "I remember the time was early in the morning at about 7.30-8.00am. There were three lines of soldiers in the boat and running on top was our commanding officer who shouted 'Come on, Suffolks!' I turned around and one barge behind us got hit. I don't know how many got killed or injured but we were as much concerned about safety as well as getting to the objective and carrying on."

The Suffolks quickly left the beach and Selby soon witnessed casualties as the infantry fought their way through, "We weren't on Sword Beach for long and went to Ouistreham, which was a little village [at the time]. We were going through it and some of our chaps were already injured or shot. They had been mortaring the village as they went through. I could see one of our lads, a young sergeant, having his wounds dressed and this was a few minutes after we started to go through the village."

Although the Suffolks took dozens of German prisoners they also incurred fatalities, "Two friends of mine were shot, one [only a couple of feet away]. I was able to man a machine-gun and there was a lance corporal shouting 'Charge!' but a few feet from where I was standing a corporal was shot through the throat. I got down quick because I thought I was going to be the next one. I assumed it was a sniper but luckily for us a tank came down a few yards from us. They were shouting 'Come on, Suffolks!' but as I went out two or three more lads were downed. They were some of the best and were really great blokes. That's the kind of day it was."

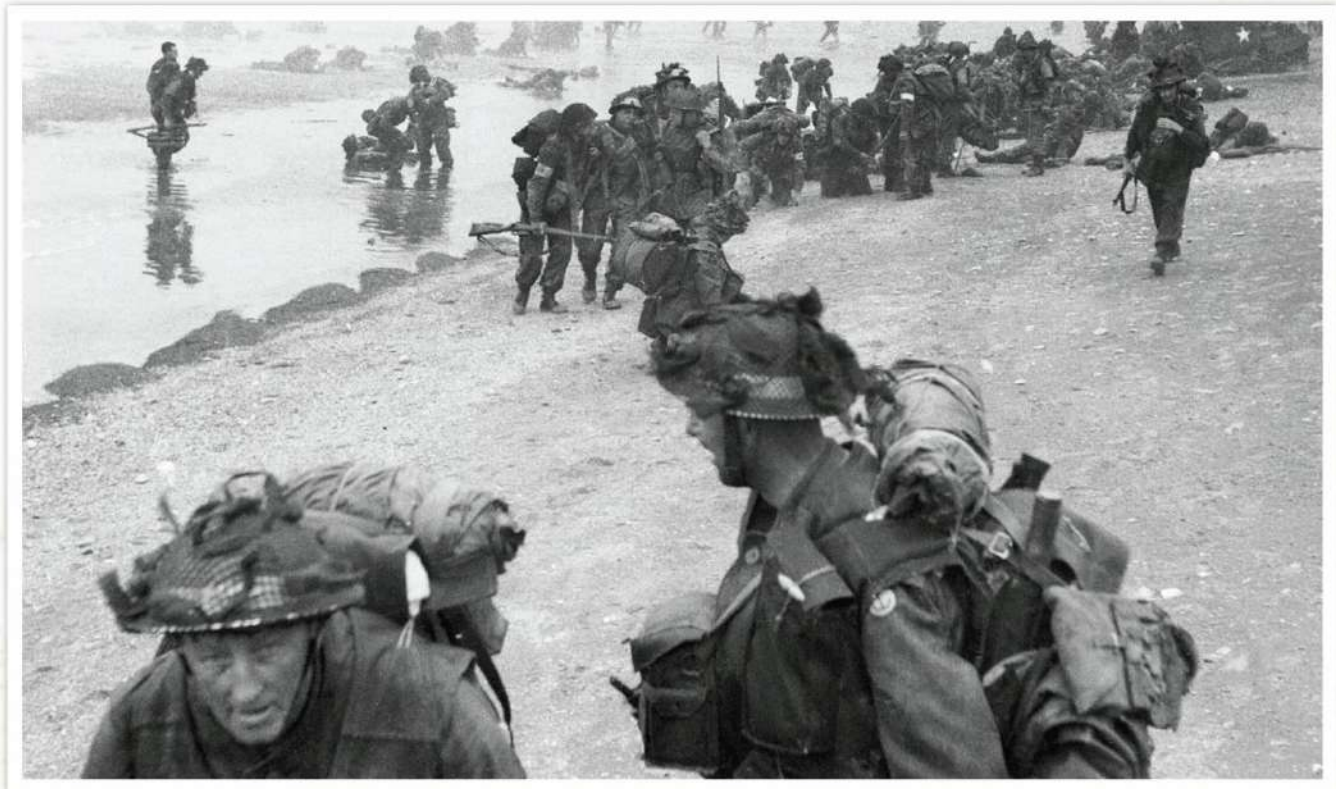
After the carnage and losses of D-Day, the Suffolks had to push inland although the Allies became bogged down in the dense Normandy countryside. At one point, the battalion found themselves under enemy artillery fire, "We were in a wood where you could get lost. The trouble was that it got constantly mortared and the mortars exploded above the trees on everybody below. You could hear them coming and I dived down because I thought I'd got hit. The shrapnel had actually hit my helmet but I dived to the floor anyway."

British troops follow a Sherman tank towards a Normandy village after the D-Day landings, 6 June 1944

© Alamy

The Suffolks also participated in the Battle of Caen, a prolonged struggle that lasted into August 1944 and saw the destruction of the city by Allied air attacks, “We were dug in outside Caen, which we should have took on D-Day. The commanders decided to bomb it and there were hundreds of American and British bombers. All of the fumes and smoke were coming to where we were sitting and the planes came our way. You even saw some of the aircraft being hit.”

By the time the Battle of Normandy ended on 30 August 1944, 22,442 British servicemen had been killed. As a private, Selby believes that his survival during the campaign owed something to his rank, “The officers and NCOs were the ones that got shot because the Germans knew that we followed them. In a way, I was luckier being a lower rank.”



British troops hurriedly move out of the ‘Queen’ area of Sword Beach. Two soldiers in the background carry a wounded comrade

Source: Wiki / PD

“AS I WENT OUT TWO OR THREE MORE LADS WERE DOWNED. THEY WERE SOME OF THE BEST AND WERE REALLY GREAT BLOKES. THAT’S THE KIND OF DAY IT WAS”

Advance through Europe

The Allied breakout from Normandy at the end of August 1944 was a decisive moment and German forces swiftly withdrew across occupied France with the Allies in relentless pursuit, "The Germans would retreat quite far back sometimes and we had the Yanks with us who were red-hot with loads of troops. At one place we were [stopped at] the Americans were driving through. One of our lads shouted 'Have you got a cigarette?' and he received a boxful! Everybody in our lot then had packets of cigarettes."

While he was still in France, Selby had a close shave during a night-time bombardment, "You just went on and on and there were some places where you didn't even know where you were. On one particular night the moon was very bright and the Germans were shooting down from hills because I think they could see most of us in the light. I had to drop down all of a sudden and there was nobody near me. A mortar bomb came down and I thought it was going to hit me. I was right by its side and when it exploded the blast bumped my head. I don't know how I survived."

A frequent occurrence during the advance was the capture of German soldiers, although it was often fraught with risk, "I took one prisoner on a night patrol down a narrow lane. There were four of us and I said 'There's somebody down here'. We were on edge and moved back a little bit before I grabbed a man who turned out to be a German. He'd got a red light on him and was probably doing some signalling when he came down the lane. When we took him back a friend of mine from Birmingham almost shot me while he was waiting on guard.

"On another night there were three of us and there was a German stuck in the middle of the road. He couldn't move because he'd only got [the use of] one leg. Me and another chap were crawling backwards while a Jerry was firing above us. We could hear the bullets although as we got further away he stopped firing. This other chap said 'We can't leave him [the German] here' and I said 'Of course not'. We grabbed him by the arms and took him back. I don't know if his wounds were patched up before he was handed over."

As the Allies advanced through France and then Belgium they liberated the local populations who had been occupied since 1940. However, Selby recalls that they were not always welcomed, "Some of the younger ladies fancied the Jerries and I suppose it was one of those things after years of occupation. I remember passing one lady and she was staring daggers at me while we were walking through. She had a baby and was probably one of the Germans' girls."

Despite these women's antipathy towards the Allies, their neighbours would inflict a cruel punishment for fraternising with the occupying forces, "Whenever a girl had messed about with the Germans they would get a pair of German soldiers' trousers and pin it on their door. The locals would then get the girls, cut their hair and march them through the town."

"It was a disaster"

After passing through Belgium, the 1st Suffolks advanced into the Netherlands. Despite being in continuous action, the British troops were welcomed by the Dutch, "Jerry was often about 200 yards away from us in Holland but I remember two young girls kept running out and giving us bread and bacon. We also took a place in Weert and the local kids were coming up to us and wondering if we would play football with them! The Jerries had only just retreated and were more or less still there. However, across the canal there was a nunnery and the nuns came out and sang to us. That was bloody marvellous."

Despite the liberation of the southern part of the country, the Allied progress dramatically stalled during Operation Market Garden in September 1944. Selby remembered the vain attempt of the battalion to relieve trapped British airborne troops, "We dropped a lot of paratroopers at Arnhem but it was a disaster and we got stuck. The paratroopers were being cut off and the regiment went to help them out but we could only go so far. They stopped us at a certain place and we lumbered there before moving on again."

Instead of Arnhem, the Suffolks were dispatched to Nijmegen. The city was close to

British infantrymen in the ruins of Caen – a signpost points their way east

© Getty

VICTORY IN BIRMINGHAM

Britain's second city celebrated the end of hostilities with bonhomie, good humour and reflectiveness

The weather in Birmingham was initially wet on 8 May 1945 but it did not dampen the spirits of its citizens. Like much of the rest of the country, bunting was strung out across the streets and party food was hastily assembled from saved-up rations. The hidden supplies included fireworks that were set off in the northern suburb of Kingstanding along with bonfires in Billesey. The street parties were also a carnival of improvised music with people bringing out wirelesses, gramophones and musical instruments.

In the city centre, Birmingham Cathedral held eight services on VE Day that were attended by 4,000 people while thousands converged in public areas such as New Street and the Bull Ring. Nearby Bromsgrove Street even put out a cheeky notice, "Please don't call for the rent – we've spent it celebrating victory."

No plans had been made for sound arrangements to listen to Winston Churchill's 3.00pm broadcast in Victoria Square. However, the lord mayor – Alderman W. T. Wiggins-Davies – did his best by opening his council office window and placing his personal radio on the window ledge. He then gamely led the crowd in community singing before loudspeakers were installed for George VI's speech at 9.00pm.

After the king's speech, Wiggins-Davies made a statement, "I am proud of Birmingham and its citizens. The city has known many dark and anxious days and thousands have lost their loved ones. We think of them very specially at this moment. Thousands of us still have our loved ones away, many still in danger or as prisoners of war. May God grant us true understanding of this, His supreme gift – the gift of freedom."

© Alamy

***Right:** People dancing in central Birmingham. Albert Selby also danced on VE Day although he jokes that he had "two left feet"*

"WE DROPPED A LOT OF PARATROOPERS AT ARNHEM BUT IT WAS A DISASTER AND WE GOT STUCK"

the German border and American-led forces had captured the strategically important Waalbrug bridge over the River Waal, "The Americans had taken the bridge at Nijmegen and all their helmets were on the floor when we got there. The Germans used to come and fire from a distance because they wanted the bridge back. However, we wanted it for our crossing."

Fighting continued in the city and it was during this time that Selby lost one of his friends, Lance Corporal Reginald Cooksey, "He was killed by the side of me and there was nothing you could do. He was a likeable guy and had three children. It's who they leave behind that I think about, it's terrible."

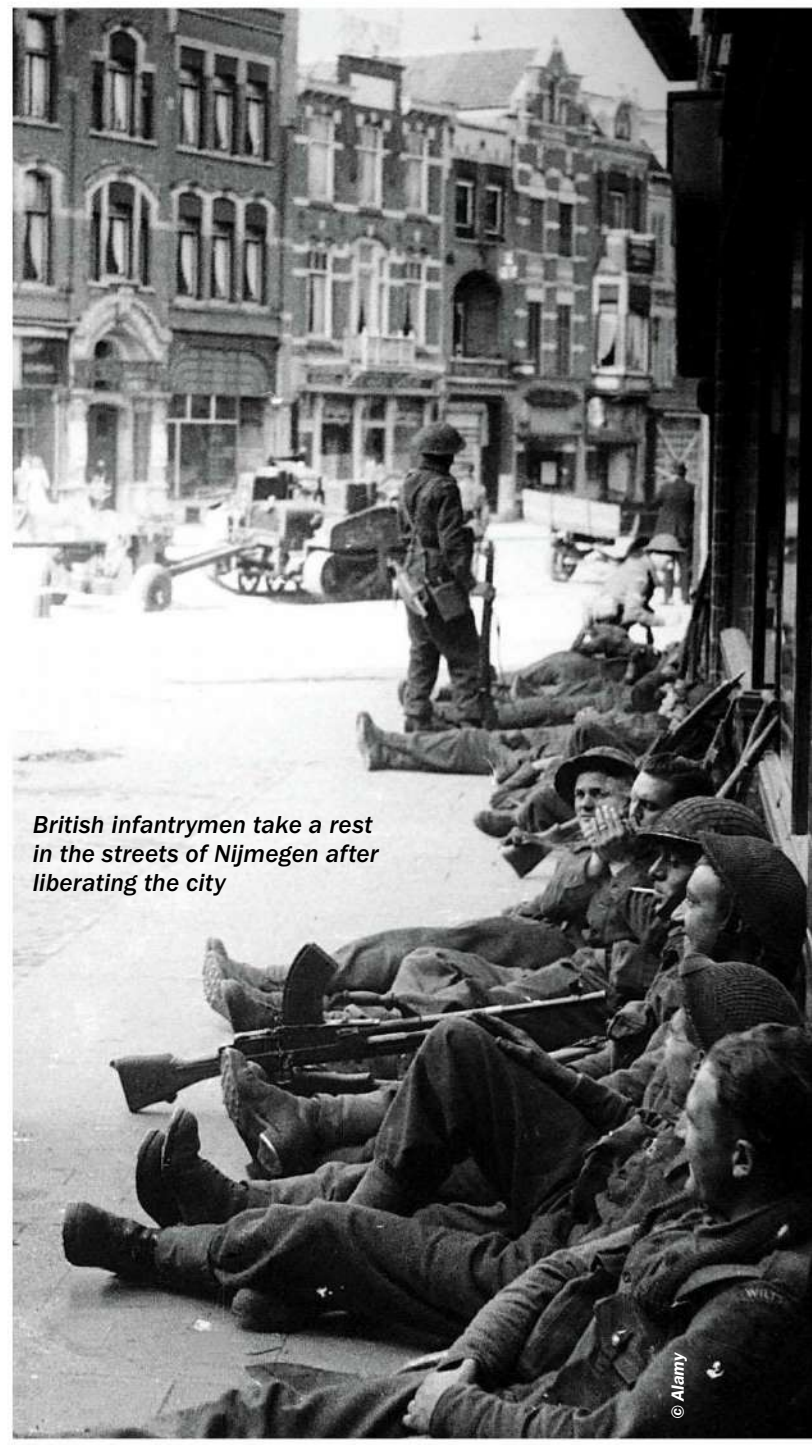
Selby was himself seriously wounded during an attack, "I ran into a house for safety but I was hit by a blast and wounded in the right ear." Selby had also been injured on one side of his body and face and was briefly treated in Brussels before being flown to London in a Dakota transport plane. He was then hospitalised nearer home at Dudley Guest Hospital, "There were wounded people in there that had every kind of injury. I wanted to know what was going to happen and my first thought was about the operation. I spent a few months in hospital and they took me to different specialists. I was then discharged from the army and had the operation afterwards."

"You miss them"

By the end of the war, Selby was working again in Birmingham. Although he had been medically released from military service and seen extensive action in Europe, he was mistakenly accosted by an angry civilian, "A young girl stopped me in the street and called me everything under the sun. I was wearing a 'Discharged' badge on my clothes but she said 'You should be out fighting with the lads!' She gave me hell and I couldn't really explain to her what I was doing. I was annoyed, but what could you do?"

On 8 May 1945, Selby celebrated VE Day in his home area of Balsall Heath. He remembers the jubilation but primarily recalls feeling relieved, "Everybody was happy and some people were climbing up lampposts. I was dancing myself outside somebody's house but I'd got two left feet! My main memory I have of VE Day is that I was glad there would be no more bombing during the day or night. People could finally get some sleep because the bombing had been murder. From where I lived in Balsall Heath you could see where every bomb was being dropped in the city centre during the blitz."

Now the recipient of the Légion d'honneur from the French government for his role in the liberation of France, Selby hasn't forgotten what the war cost his closest friends, "I never tried to get the medal and it's hard to put into words really. I was happy to receive it but sad about the soldiers who were left behind. My friends in the regiment were great. You worked with them for years and you miss them. I always think about those they left behind."



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British infantrymen take a rest in the streets of Nijmegen after liberating the city

VE DAY

GLOBAL CELEBRATIONS

Festivities began after Germany unconditionally surrendered

On 7 May 1945, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower accepted the unconditional surrender of all German forces at Reims in France. The signed document came into effect the following day, which became known as 'Victory in Europe' or 'VE' Day. Joseph Stalin demanded his own unconditional surrender from the Germans and so another document was signed by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel in Berlin on 8 May. While Keitel was completing the final German surrender, celebrations erupted across the western world on the same day. Newspapers went into circulation as soon as possible, including special editions that were already printed to relay the long-awaited announcement.

The euphoria was profound in Britain as VE Day was declared a national holiday. Festivities actually began on 7 May with street parties, flags and bonfires appearing across the country. Rationing was partially suspended with the Ministry of Food ensuring enough supplies and restaurants releasing special 'Victory' menus. Bunting could be bought without ration coupons and commemorative items such as 'VE Day' mugs were hastily produced.

London, which had suffered intense bombing, became a central hub for celebrations. St Paul's Cathedral held ten consecutive peace services on 8 May and massive crowds gathered in the city, including 50,000 people around Piccadilly Circus.

Source: Wiki / PD

Troops in Burma read President Truman's Victory Proclamation

"ON THE CHAMPS-ÉLYSÉES THEY WERE SINGING 'IT'S A LONG WAY TO TIPPERARY' WHILE IN THE PLACE DE LA CONCORDE AND PLACE DE L'ÉTOILE THERE WAS HARDLY ANY PLACE TO BREATHE."

The day was also the zenith of Prime Minister Winston Churchill's career as he made a national radio broadcast, where he cautioned that the war with Japan was not over. Nevertheless, he gave an impromptu speech from the Ministry of Health's balcony where he declared to crowds, "This is your victory." King George VI also gave a radio address and he and the Royal Family made eight appearances on the balcony of Buckingham Palace, including one with Churchill.

Across the English Channel, Parisians gathered in the city centre and mingled with Allied servicemen, which led to a polyglot atmosphere. One eyewitness remembered, "On the Champs-Élysées they were singing *It's a Long Way to Tipperary* while in the Place de la Concorde and Place de l'Étoile there was hardly any place to breathe."

In the USA, 15,000 New York policemen had to be mobilised to control the huge crowds that had gathered in Times Square but celebrations were officially muted. President Harry S. Truman dedicated VE Day to his recently deceased predecessor Franklin D. Roosevelt and flags were flown at half-mast as part of a 30-day mourning period. The mood was also partially sombre in Australia with many Australians still on active service in the Far East. The jubilations in Canada even led to unrest when riots broke out in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Thousands of military personnel broke into closed liquor stores and the ensuing vandalism resulted in several deaths.

VE Day continued into 9 May as the Soviet Union marked the event in line with Keitel's surrender the day before. Due to the time difference, New Zealanders had actually been at work on 8 May and so waited to celebrate on the same day as the USSR.

Despite the happiness on VE Day, there was also sadness and grief for those who had lost family and friends and concern for those who were still fighting the Japanese. In May 1945, the war in the Far East was far from over.

Parisians and Allied troops flood the Champs-Élysées on 8 May

© Getty

A MESSAGE FROM THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Britain's foremost military charity calls on everyone to remember, help and assist the veteran community during the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic

"To mark the 75th anniversaries of VE and VJ Day, the Royal British Legion is calling on the United Kingdom to pay tribute to the entire Second World War generation and all that they sacrificed in the defence of our freedom. The conflict had a profound impact on communities across the UK and Commonwealth, which continued long after the war ended. The Legion would like to encourage the public to remember the contribution of all Allied forces, including the Commonwealth, without whom the liberation of Europe and the Far East would not have been possible.

"Just as it was in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Royal British Legion remains a place to provide practical support when needed to the Armed Forces community. In the current challenges the nation faces, the welfare and safety of veterans is the charity's priority, and the Legion continues to monitor the situation closely. We will follow relevant advice from Public Health England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as appropriate regarding our VE and VJ activity. The Legion is working with its community, the people they support, its staff, volunteers, partners and supporters, ensuring their safety and well-being is of the highest priority as they respond during these unprecedented times. The Legion is encouraging all communities to join forces to ensure help and care is available for anyone who is experiencing hardship, loneliness or isolation. Thank you."

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND HOW TO HELP VISIT: WWW.RBL.ORG.UK

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

“INTO THE LION’S DEN”

Fred Duffield parachuted into the Third Reich and advanced across the German countryside before ending the war on the Baltic coast

The Western Allied invasion of Germany began in earnest when the US 12th Army Group crossed the River Rhine on 22 March 1945. Two days later, paratroopers from the British 6th Airborne Division and US 17th Airborne Division launched Operation Varsity – a huge aerial attack to enter northern Germany. Varsity involved almost 17,000 paratroopers and several thousand aircraft. One of those parachuting soldiers was Private Fred Duffield, an 18-year-old medic whose drop into the Third Reich was his first ever combat jump. For this already battle-hardened teenager, Varsity was just the beginning of over a month’s fighting in Germany that would only end on VE Day.

“Honing a sharp knife”

Born in Staffordshire in April 1926, Duffield was conscripted into the British Army shortly after he turned 18, “I was called up in May 1944 but I was expecting it. I first did my basic training at Shrewsbury before we took different ‘trade’ tests. They told me I could either go in the REME, Service Corps, Royal Engineers or the Medical Corps. I told the officer that I’d like to join the Medical Corps because my father had served in it.”

After joining the Royal Army Medical Corps, Duffield learned the art of treating wounded soldiers in the field, “I was trained to bandage people up with a ‘shell’ dressing. This was a dressing with disinfectant in a waterproof pouch. All you had to do was rip this off and you had a pad with a bandage that was ready to put the dressing on. We also carried various slings for different wounds as well as morphine, aspirins and Gentian Violet.”

During this time, Duffield was given an opportunity to earn more money, “While I was in training two officers came from the Parachute Regiment to give us a lecture. They said if we joined them we’d get two extra shillings a day. That brought my pay up to five shillings a day, which was very good.”

Duffield was sent for paratrooper training at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire and RAF Ringway on the edge of Manchester, “We learned about parachuting but we also had to be fit. I was a soldier but they said that being a paratrooper was like honing a sharp knife. They were putting the finishing touches to us so we did physical training every hour of every day.”

Jumping out of aircraft came with many risks, including the obvious and unexpected, “During the training I once parachuted upside down and had the rigging lines wrapped around my legs. When I landed some Land Army girls came running down the field and helped me out of my chute but they then ran off with it!”

Having only been conscripted in the spring of 1944, Duffield was a fully trained medic and paratrooper by the year’s end. He was swiftly attached to the 12th Parachute Battalion, and was eager to put his training to use, “I was proud to be a soldier in the Parachute Regiment, especially as a lad of 18 where I was put in with Normandy veterans. I wanted to do my bit for King and Country.”

Battle of the Bulge

The 12th Battalion was deployed to the Ardennes in December 1944 during the maelstrom of the Battle of the Bulge. Notorious for its wintry fighting, Duffield recalls that his baptism of fire was a testing time, “Conditions during the battle were grim. For instance, we were by Dinant and Namur and the troops were up to their knees in snow. At one time we were fighting for this village while it was snowing like hell and two of our lads jumped into a foxhole. They dug to make it deeper but found they’d been standing on a dead German who had been covered in snow.”

While his comrades struggled in freezing conditions, Duffield was billeted at a monastery that had been converted into a hospital, “I was put on the door with a pile of blankets. When the stretcher-bearers came in with a wounded chap I would give them a blanket and a clean stretcher to take away.”

Working in a war hospital during a battle also required performing tragic tasks, “When the stretcher-bearers came in with a dead person a mate and I had to cross the courtyard and put them in the stables of the monastery. Everything was dark because there were no lights or candles, except for what we were using for the hospital. One chap said to me ‘I’m not straddling over those dead people anymore’. I had to get a stretcher in with dead people on my own because nobody else wanted to go in.”

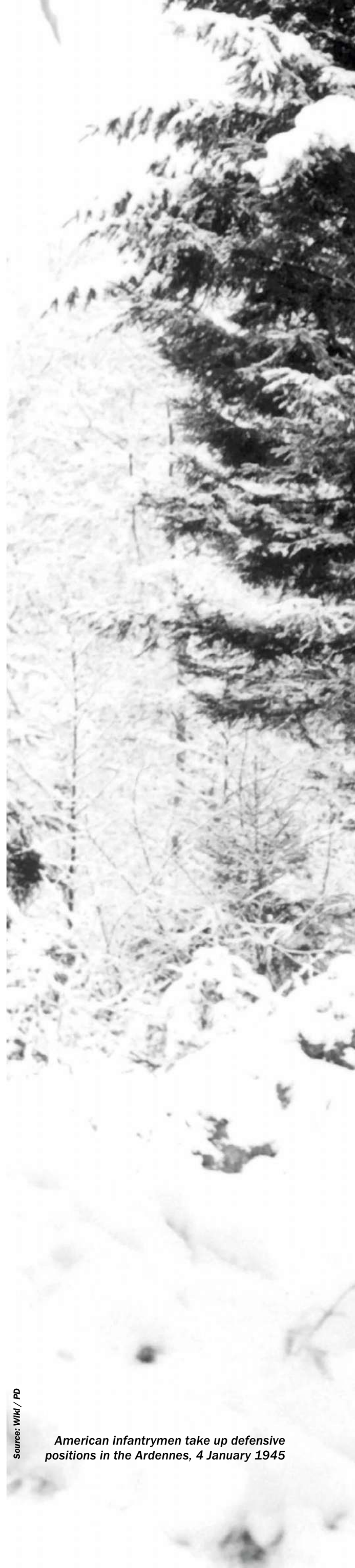
To confound the desperate situation, Duffield was also poorly armed, “When we went to the Ardennes I was given a .45 pistol to guard myself but by the time we did the Rhine crossing I’d already handed it back in. There were not enough pistols to go round so I didn’t get one. I remember being in a village near Namur where we were on one side of the river and the Germans the other. I was guarding an ambulance outside a cinema but with the Germans just down the road I was only given a pickaxe handle!”

“A German plane came over and Americans along the river opened fire at it. Next door to this cinema was a shop with wine bottles in the window. I said to the lad next to me ‘If that aircraft comes back again, this pickaxe handle is going through that window and we’re going to have a drink!’ Luckily, the plane didn’t come back.”

Crossing the Rhine

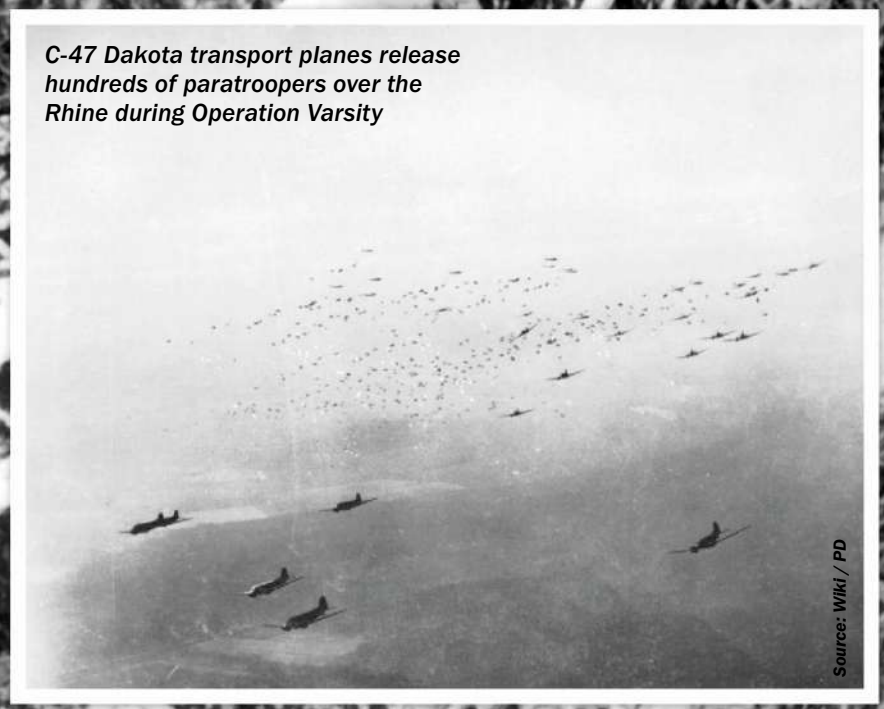
After the Allies won the Battle of the Bulge in late January 1945, preparations began for the invasion of northern Germany. As part of 6th Airborne Division, 12th Battalion was to participate in Operation Varsity. Part of the wider Operation Plunder, Varsity was designed to assist the river assaults across the Rhine by landing the paratroopers on the eastern bank near Hamminkeln and Wesel.

The 6th Airborne was tasked with seizing the high ground of Diersfort Wood, which overlooked the Rhine, and to capture Hamminkeln and Schnappenberg. This involved 540 aircraft towing 1,300 gliders into fierce German defensive fire. It was the largest airborne operation in history to be conducted on a single day and in one location. For Duffield – who was still only 18 – the invasion would be the culmination of his training, “It was my



Source: Wiki / PD

American infantrymen take up defensive positions in the Ardennes, 4 January 1945



C-47 Dakota transport planes release hundreds of paratroopers over the Rhine during Operation Varsity

Source: Wiki / PD

Fred Duffield trained in this Airspeed Horsa glider in Palestine

© Fred Duffield

"I WAS PROUD TO BE A SOLDIER IN THE PARACHUTE REGIMENT, ESPECIALLY AS A LAD OF 18 WHERE I WAS PUT IN WITH NORMANDY VETERANS. I WANTED TO DO MY BIT FOR KING AND COUNTRY"

first jump in combat and into the lion's den, although I've still got my pants!"

On the morning of 24 March 1945, Duffield flew in a Dakota to the drop zone over Hamminkeln, "We were standing up in the aircraft and the Germans' anti-aircraft guns were firing at us. You could hear it like rainfall on the Dakota's fuselage going 'patter, patter, patter' with these shells exploding. However, we had to stand up ready to bail out."

Duffield had to quickly adapt to events during the drop and after he landed, "There were four of us in a stretcher party and I was 'Number Four' in the aircraft. Number Three got off the plane because he wanted to go to the toilet but he never came back so we had to take off with only three of us. Number One got wounded during the drop so that only left me with this other chap.

"When we landed I was told I couldn't pick anybody up who was wounded during the drop. I was told to get to my rendezvous point as soon as possible so I ignored the wounded in the drop zone, including a glider that had crashed with perhaps 12-20 men inside. They had tipped over and the men were shouting 'Get me out!' and 'Help, I'm wounded!'"

Duffield pressed on into enemy territory but deviated from his orders to assist some comrades, "When I was approaching my rendezvous I came across three wounded friends. One was Lieutenant Cattel who I knew very well. The other two were our sergeants and as I was dressing them a farmhouse door opened. A rifle came pointing out and I could see it through the corner of my eye. I took no notice and carried on because Lieutenant Cattel was unconscious through loss of blood. I injected him with morphine and put a tourniquet and dressing on his leg. I also tended to the other two who were not so badly wounded."

"TONIGHT IS THE PROUDEST MOMENT IN OUR HISTORY BECAUSE WE SHALL BE LEADING THE MAIN PART OF THE BRITISH ARMY INTO GERMANY"

After treating his friends, Duffield faced the pointing gun, "This rifle came out again with a white flag on the end. Three Germans then came over with their hands in the air. I beckoned to them and tried to explain in German that I wanted to get these wounded men into the farmhouse, which was far safer than being out in the open."

While the new prisoners assisted Duffield, a parachute officer arrived, "I told him what I wanted to do with these men, especially Lieutenant Cattel. He said 'I'll take care of them now. You get along to your rendezvous and take these direction signs with you'. These were canes with white arrows on top that said 'RAP' [Regimental Aid Post]. This was going to be the farmhouse I had just left but I thought 'I'm not going to wander around trying to get shot at' so I threw it over the nearest hedge and carried on to my rendezvous."

Duffield's experiences upon landing in Germany reflected the initial heavy casualties that 6th Airborne Division suffered that day. However, all their objectives were taken within five and a half hours despite tenacious resistance from German forces. The linkup

© Fred Duffield

Fred Duffield tended to the wounds of Lieutenant Ted Cattel (front, saluting) shortly after landing in Germany during Operation Varsity

with ground forces ferrying across the Rhine was achieved and thousands of prisoners were taken, 6th Airborne then took the lead in an advance through Germany.

The 12th Battalion's colonel was pleased to be in the vanguard although it was the beginning of frequent battles, "He had us all on parade and said 'Tonight is the proudest moment in our history because we shall be leading the main part of the British Army into Germany. A Company will take the lead from 23.00 hours before B and C Companies so you can all share the honours'. I was in B Company and we were struggling along the grass verge because we didn't want to make a noise.

"However, this voice shouted 'Achtung! Halt!' I jumped into this ditch on the side of the road while a German opened up with an automatic rifle. It was like a machine-gun firing and I pressed my nose into the dirt. I could hear the bullets whistling past my head and if I had looked up I would have had my head blown off. It was that close – I could hear them whizzing past. To tell you the truth, I said my prayers that night."

During the advance, Duffield came under fire from all sides, "We were shot at a lot although it was infrequent because we weren't in the front line every day. It was the tanks that took the brunt of the battles. We had the Grenadier Guards with us in Churchill tanks so they took the brunt followed by the infantry who tried their best to keep up. You could go two or three days before you came across some 'grief' from the Germans. At other times we were attacked or bombarded by our own aircraft. That happened to us three times. We had a crescent-coloured neckerchief and when we were being attacked by a Spitfire we had to wave it and duck. It thought we were Germans because we had advanced so far."

Along the route, Duffield saw a devastated country and received a mixed reception from German civilians, "All of Germany had been very heavily bombed or shelled. Some of the Germans were very good although some weren't. When we took over a village or a house the Germans had to get out, no matter what time of the day it was. We couldn't fraternise with them so we had to drag them out into the street under duress.

"For instance, at Osnabrück it was raining heavily and we banged on the door of this big house. A chap came out in his nightshirt and we dragged him and his wife into the street before we moved in. I snuggled down into his clean sheets while he was out in the wet. I don't know how long they stayed out there for because they disappeared – they had to. However, at another time we went past a farmyard and there were three farm ladies with churns offering us milk! That was the

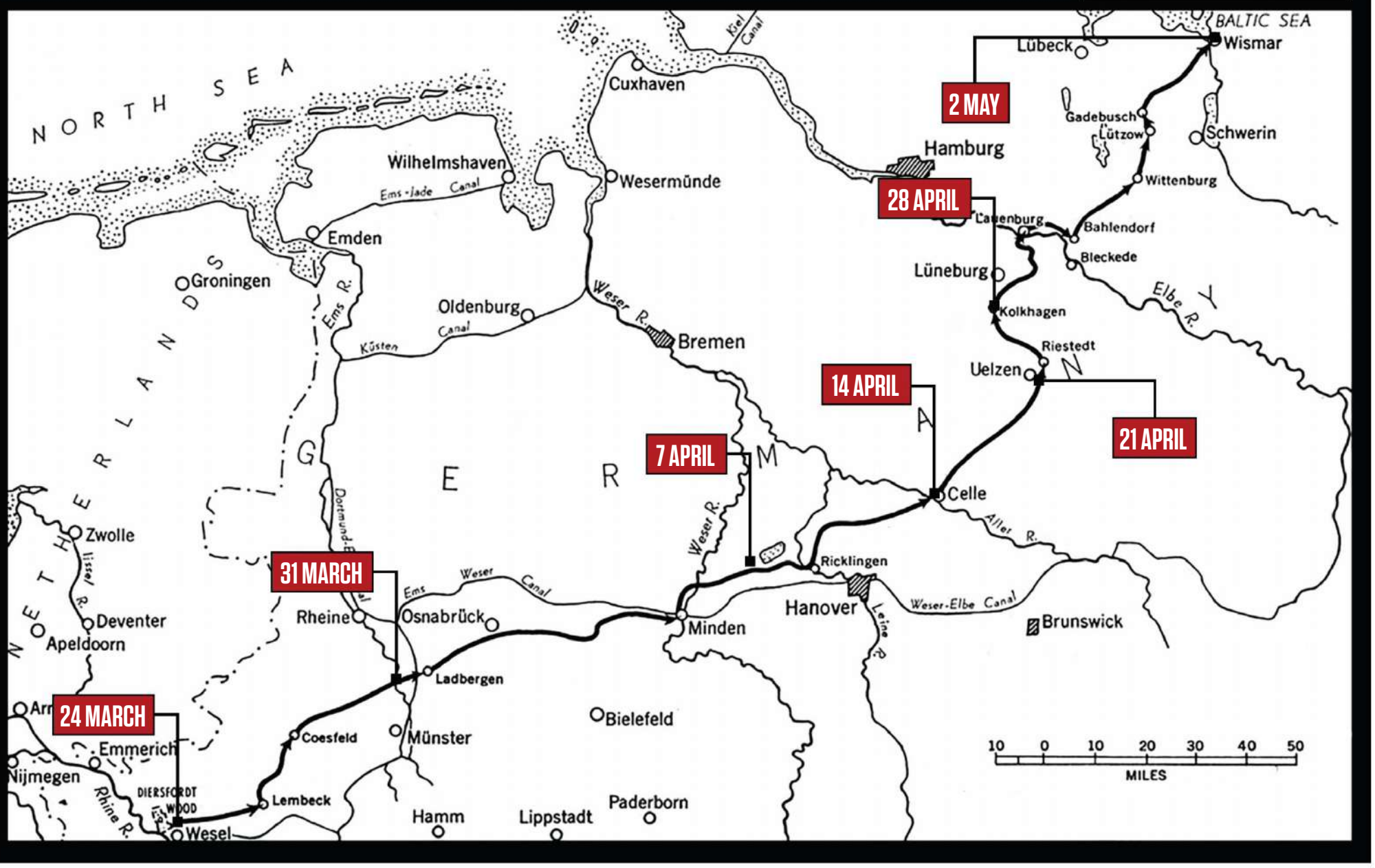
Source: Wiki / PD

Wesel was six miles from Duffield's drop zone at Hamminkeln. A strategic depot, it was heavily bombed between February-March 1945 before Operation Varsity. Ninety-seven per cent of the city was destroyed

DUFFIELD'S PROGRESS

Between 24 March-2 May 1945, Fred Duffield advanced across the width of Germany with 6th Airborne Division via enemy towns, cities, lakes, rivers and ports

Following the success of Operation Varsity, 6th Airborne Division took the lead in a 300-mile advance through Germany. Marching at 11 miles per day, they arrived at the Baltic port of Wismar with Soviet forces advancing from the east. Along the way, the division had passed through the cities of Osnabrück and Lüneberg, bypassed the large lake at Steinhuder Meer and crossed the rivers Rhine, Ems, Weser and Elbe.



difference, it really depended on the individual how we were received."

During their progress, the paratroopers learned that British forces had liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp on 15 April 1945 and made the local population understand what had been discovered, "We heard about Belsen when the *Daily Mirror* was issued to us and we pinned the newspaper on the door of a village corner shop. We made any German civilians – man or woman – understand about it by looking at the picture. We could have come across something similar ourselves."

"Burma Looms Ahead"

On 2 May, Duffield's battalion had almost reached the port of Wismar on the Baltic coast, "We were going up to Denmark to keep the peace. However, we couldn't get further than a nearby village because there were so many refugees coming down the road. This village also had 2,000-3,000 prisoners who surrendered to us that night."

Inexplicably, one German officer volunteered his services, "I was looking at some abandoned trucks when a German convoy came down the road with a motorbike and a high-ranking officer in a machine-gun mounted sidecar. When he saw me they pulled up and I went over. They weren't shooting and this officer told me he was coming to help the British fight the Russians! He was saying 'Boom, boom. Krieg kaput. War is finished' etc. I told him to get on down the road to headquarters so they carried on."

The 12th Battalion was now responsible for thousands of prisoners, "These 2,000-3,000 German troops were put in the village football field that night. Our colonel mounted a machine-gun on one of the posts and issued a command to the gunner 'If anyone tries anything during the night I've got orders to open up and you will all be killed'. They were still there next morning when I went to disarm them. We were sorting to see if they had any revolvers or daggers. I had to remove everything, including dinner knives. One chap came with photographs and kept saying 'Mein frau'. This meant his wife so I allowed him to keep those."

Days later, the war in Europe ended and Duffield was in Wismar for VE Day. The paratroopers had to improvise their celebrations, "Wismar was dry and there no drinks there so our colonel said we'd have a gymkhana instead. The German transport used a lot of horses so there were horses everywhere. Some of our lads rode bareback on these horses and we had races. A two-seater spotter plane landed and a sergeant came out dressed as a bookie with a big leather case. He had handfuls of German money, which was of no value, and threw these notes about saying 'Make a bet!'"

The celebrations descended into a fiery farce, "We were going to have a big bonfire and there was a German train loaded with timber. Our lads piled it up and it was soaked in petrol so that it would burn well. Our colonel was a rider and that night he came down on a white horse with a flaming torch to throw on this bonfire. It went up with a 'WHOOMPH' and the horse bolted up the field! We had quite a party."

Despite the euphoric atmosphere, Duffield and his comrades were sharply reminded that the war was not actually over, "VE Day was not a surprise but it was a great relief not to be shot at anymore. We could get back to normal, or so we thought. This was because our colonel soon had us all on parade. He said 'Do you know what 'BLA' means? You think it stands for 'British Liberation Army' but you're wrong – we're going home'. We all cheered but he then said 'We're going home but we're then going to Burma'. That's what BLA stood for – Burma Looms Ahead – and that's what we did. It was an anti-climax."

"Ever Grateful"

After a period of leave, the battalion was deployed to India before they conducted a raid on the Malayan coast to search for Japanese troops. VJ Day saved Duffield from experiencing combat in the Far East and he was among the first British troops to re-enter Singapore. He remained in the British Army until he was demobbed in 1947 with the rank of corporal.

Now a recipient of the Légion d'honneur, Duffield is pleased to have received the award, "I was very proud because it wasn't just for me but my comrades who didn't come back. It's supposed to be for Normandy veterans but I got it for doing the Ardennes and the Rhine crossing. Nobody was more surprised than me when I got it in the post! I had a ceremony afterwards after the Parachute Regiment found out. They made quite a fuss, the regimental band was there and the French attaché came and presented it to three of us."

Nevertheless, despite the recognition from the French government, Duffield is perhaps most proud of one life he saved, "I eventually found out what happened to Lieutenant Cattel. The paratroopers have a magazine called *Pegasus* and in one issue was a letter from a chap who wanted to know if I knew his father, who was the lieutenant's batman. When I phoned him he said 'Lieutenant Cattel has also rang'. I said 'Hell, is he alive?!' He said 'Oh yes, very much so but he lost his leg'.

"I told him my tale and he rang the lieutenant to say that he'd found me. Lieutenant Cattel said 'I've been looking for you for the last 20 years!'. I went to see him and every Christmas after that he sent my wife 24 carnations. He was so pleased that every bouquet came with a note that said 'Ever Grateful'. He died a few years ago and left me thousands of pounds in his will. The words again said 'Ever Grateful' and the carnations still come every Christmas. I'm very proud."

"THE WORDS AGAIN SAID 'EVER GRATEFUL' AND THE CARNATIONS STILL COME EVERY CHRISTMAS. I'M VERY PROUD"

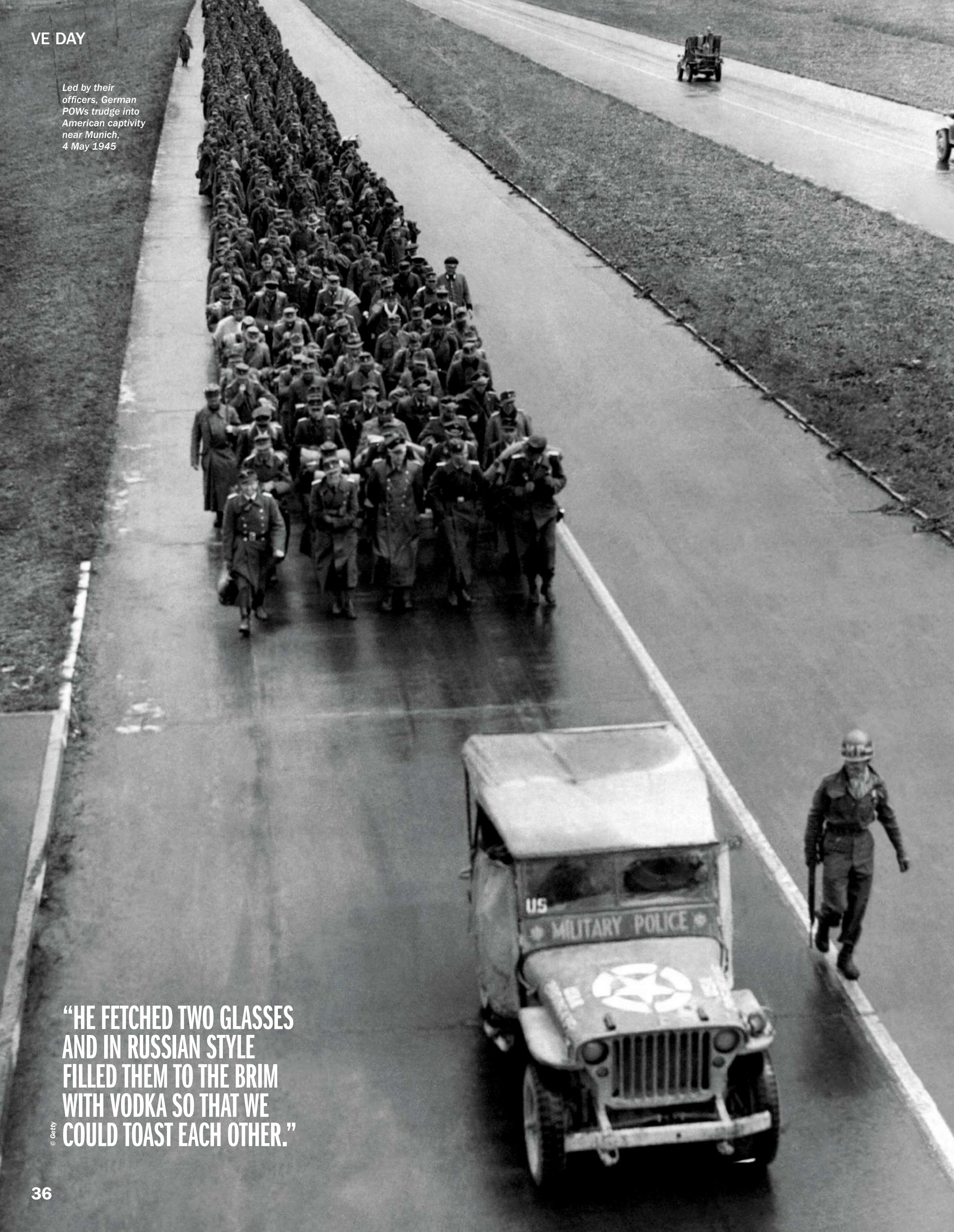
© Getty

British paratroopers walk through Hamminkeln after the successful completion of Operation Varsity, 25 March 1945

Source: Wiki / PD

British and Soviet troops greet each other at Wismar, May 1945

Led by their officers, German POWs trudge into American captivity near Munich, 4 May 1945



“HE FETCHED TWO GLASSES AND IN RUSSIAN STYLE FILLED THEM TO THE BRIM WITH VODKA SO THAT WE COULD TOAST EACH OTHER.”

© Getty

VE DAY

DEMOBILISING THE WEHRMACHT

With Europe in ruins, but Nazi Germany defeated, what happened to the millions of Wehrmacht personnel as hostilities ceased and the shooting stopped?

"I climbed up the cellar steps, opened the front door and stepped out onto the street … with a dirty white towel tied to a broomstick … the first of the Americans, a little guy, tore off all my medals which made gaping holes in my tunic … I wondered what would happen to me." Henry Metelmann, a panzer crewman with 22 Panzer-Division wasn't alone in pondering his fate as he went into captivity at the end of the war. The months leading up to the Nazi capitulation had seen mass surrender in the West in particular, with an average of 50,000 German troops a day throwing in the towel in April. One million more gave up in Italy and Austria on 2 May, and two days later another million joined them across northwestern Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands.

A senior Danish police official in the town of Odder, Assistant Commissioner Lemvigh-Müller, found himself in charge of disarming the local German forces, "At a meeting, on the fourth evening after the announcement over the radio of the German surrender in Denmark, the local representatives of the liberation movement and I discussed … the detention and disarming of German forces in Odder. At midnight we were received by the German commander, Major Erdmann, at the Phoenix. The garrison at that time consisted of about 1,000 men. Major Erdmann told us that he had received no orders and that the radio announcement was probably an English lie … he declared that if the British or the Americans approached, he would march out of town … but if the Russians came the city would be levelled. On 7 May the commandant came to see me and informed me that his men would depart the next morning. Handguns with five shots per man were left with them, all other equipment was taken over by the Resistance."

Disarmament

Under the command of their own officers for the most part, the mass of German soldiery destroyed what was left of their heavy equipment, spiking artillery guns, blowing up panzers and disabling aircraft. The favoured tactic for the latter was to remove the propeller or collapse the undercarriage. Machine-guns and rifles were often piled up and abandoned, as Norwegian SS volunteer, Ivar Corneliussen remembered, "We were in Austria when the war ended, in a small village … an officer came and told us the war was over. We collected all our weapons into a big heap and our officers told us that from this point on we were relieved of our oath." As a last show of defiance many simply dumped their weapons, as Gefreiter Robert Vogt, of 352. Infanterie-Division, recalled, "It was pointless. We were gambling with our lives for a lost cause … the war was lost. So, we threw our weapons into a stream."

Teenaged Hitler Youth and elderly Volkssturm rounded up in Berlin by the Red Army. Their fate would probably be Siberia and the gulags

© Alamy

FOREIGN SS: RETRIBUTION

For the non-German members of the Waffen-SS, VE Day signalled an end to the war, but a beginning to their punishment

Jan Munk, a 23-year-old Dutch SS volunteer, had tried to walk back to Leiden at war's end but was recognised a few miles from home and thrown into a prison cell, "I cried my eyes out … that night I heard one of the cells being opened and the occupant taken out. After the guards had their fun with him they returned him to his cell and then it was my turn … I was beaten up with fists and sticks. This went on for three nights. Waiting for your turn was the worst part." Tried and convicted, Munk was sentenced to five years hard labour. The Flemish SS man, Dries Coolens, suffered much the same treatment, "Back in Belgium I stepped off the train in Ghent and was recognised straightaway. A mob attacked me and almost beat me to death. The next thing I knew I woke up in hospital. I was convicted of taking up arms against Belgium and sentenced to death, and then had my sentence commuted to 15 years in prison."

Coolens's fellow Fleming, Albert Olbrechts, was far luckier, "We took off our uniforms and put on some civilian clothes we had stolen. We decided to hide in a barn that night and surrender the next morning … when I woke up the Americans had arrived. A black American sergeant was shouting at us to get out of the hay and put our hands up. He took me to an officer, and I told him I had been taken from Belgium to come and work in Germany, and he said 'OK' and directed me to a refugee centre." Olbrechts never went home, settling in West Germany instead. His compatriot, Oswald Van Ooteghem, also saw staying away from home as his best option, "When the war ended I thought of committing suicide … instead I called myself Hans Richter, pretended I was German, and married a German woman." Van Ooteghem would eventually serve three years, sharing a Belgian cell with his father, a renowned nationalist leader.

Jan Munk served in the 5 SS-Panzerdivision Wiking on the Russian Front and was imprisoned in the Netherlands after the war

***Below:** SS man Oswald Van Ootegehm, "I had photos taken in Army uniform to fool any checks; the shoulder boards and collar tabs were made of paper and stuck on"*

Some of the 180,000 German POWs sent to France as forced labour clear rubble in Dunkirk in July 1945

Personal papers and possessions were also destroyed, or buried in the hope of returning later to retrieve them. Those that kept medals, watches, and so on, soon found themselves relieved of them upon surrendering, just like Metelmann. Hendrik Verton a Dutch SS volunteer fighting in Breslau was one of them, "A Russian soldier tottered down the cellar steps … he was a little man, short and stocky … he grasped me to his breast … kissed me on both cheeks, declaring 'Hitler kaput!'. He stole my watch, adding them to those already decorating his arms up to his elbows … and with a heavy heart I burned my Soldbuch with all the entries of my military service in it."

Those who didn't immediately go into captivity shared out any food, blankets and spare clothing they had and then either split up to try and head home or formed into columns to surrender en-masse. Some, like Bruno Friesen, a gunner in 7 Panzer-Division, managed to melt back into the population, "I never surrendered, I was never a POW, I never attended de-nazification lectures. I just went back to my life."

One thing Friesen, Metelmann and Vogt had in common was that they were glad it was over and they had survived, but the same could not be said for German troops in the east. There, fear of their fate drove millions of soldiers and civilians alike to head west in an attempt to surrender to the Western Allies and not the Red Army.

Surrender in the east

In the end some 800,000 Wehrmacht soldiers fell into Soviet hands at the end of the war to join 2,000,000 of their comrades captured earlier on. One of those facing this fate was Günter Korschorrek, "Russia means nothing less than imprisonment in Siberia. A terrible word, it hammers away inside my head! We who have fought against the Soviets can imagine what awaits us in Siberia." Transferred west, Korschorrek was lucky and lived.

According to the Soviets' own admission some 381,067 Wehrmacht POWs would die in the gulags, although this is considered a huge underestimate with the true figure thought to be as many as 1,000,000 deaths from shooting, maltreatment, disease and starvation. However, not all German POWs falling into Soviet hands were treated badly. The highly-decorated panzer veteran Oberst Hans von Luck remembered what happened to him when a Soviet soldier tried to steal his watch and Knight's Cross, "A young officer suddenly intervened 'Stop! Don't touch him, he's a geroi [Russian for hero], a man to respect.'" Von Luck was then taken before a Red Army colonel, "He fetched two glasses and in Russian style filled them to the brim with vodka so that we could toast each other." A Luftwaffe fighter pilot had a similar experience on surrendering when marched in front of a group of Red Army officers, "The general stood up, put on his cap, gave an order to the other officers and they all raised their hands to me in military salute."

In the west – the Rheinwiesenlager

From D-Day onwards, the Americans and Anglo-Canadians were roughly capturing the same number of prisoners each, and processing them through removal by stages back to camps in the United Kingdom or North America. Treatment

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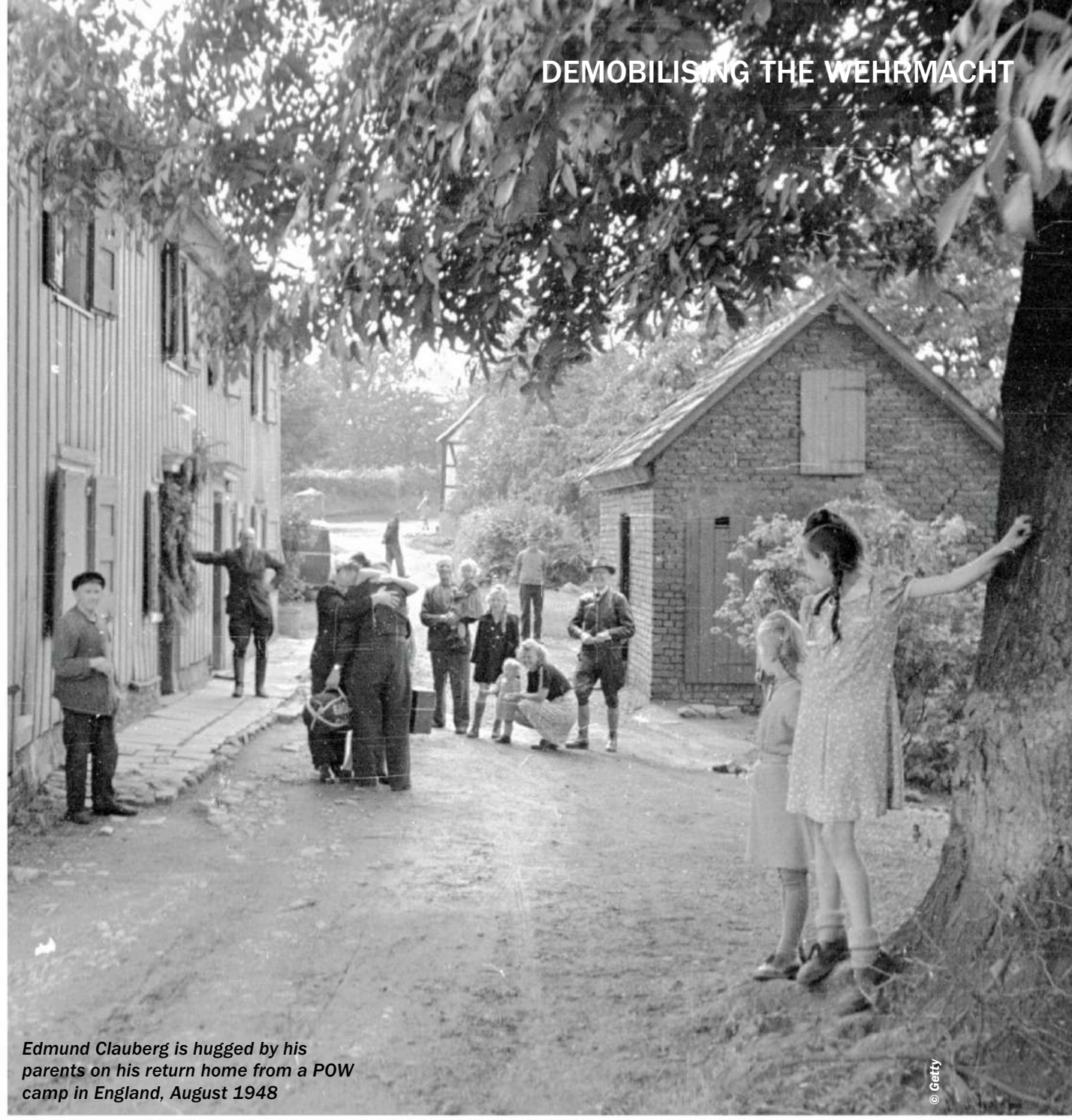
Edmund Clauberg is hugged by his parents on his return home from a POW camp in England, August 1948
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was usually fair – although looting was rampant, as the Luftwaffe pilot Norbert Hannig found out after surrendering to a young Canadian officer, "May I have your pistol please, and the holster as well – as a souvenir you understand." He was then fed a plate of steak and mashed potatoes before being handed over to the Americans. This was common practice at the war's end as the sheer numbers of new prisoners were so great the British and Canadians stopped taking in their full share, leaving their American allies with the unenviable task of housing, feeding and guarding millions of former servicemen and women.

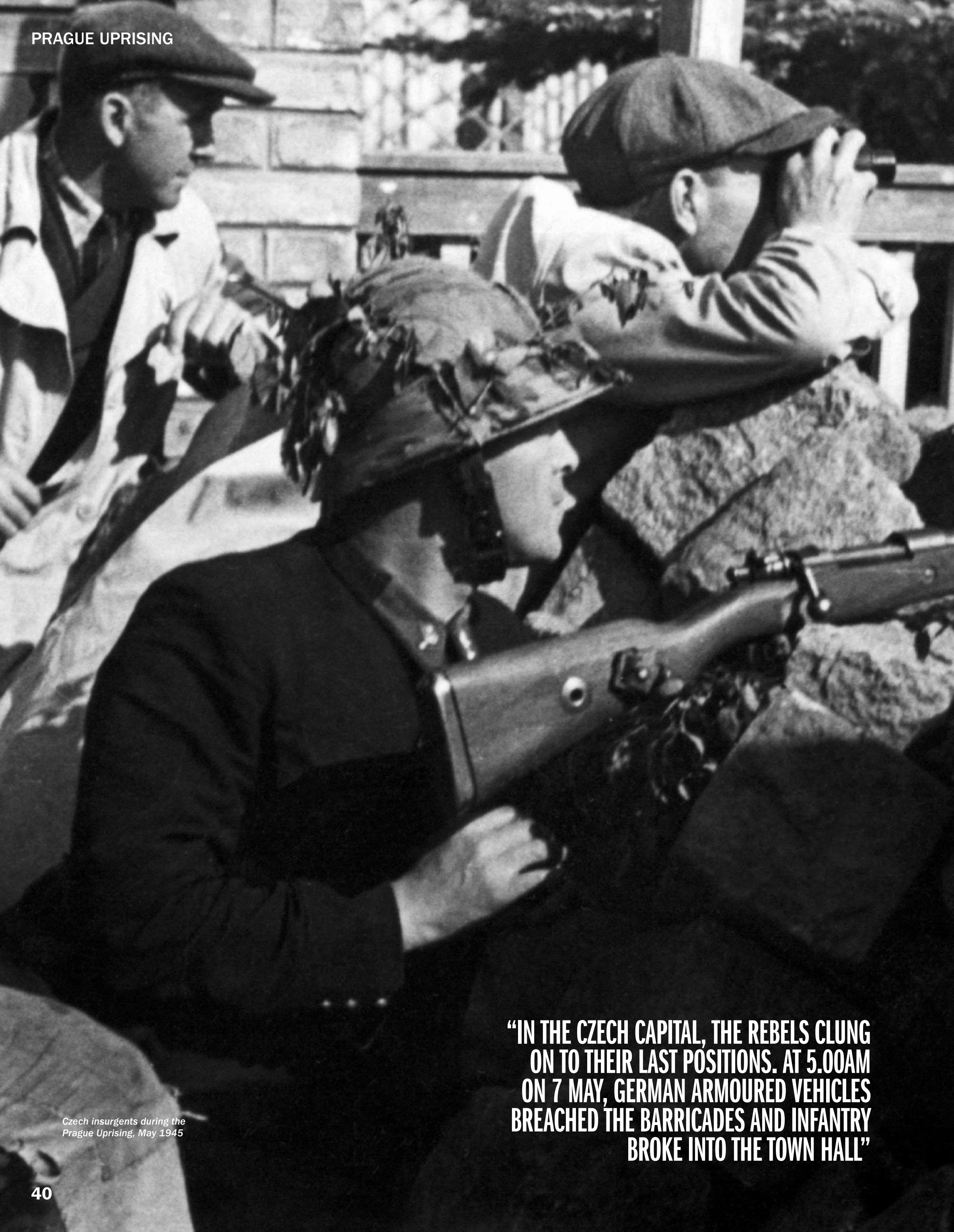
The American solution were the 19 Rheinwiesenlager – the Rhine meadow camps – built in occupied western Germany as temporary holding and processing stations. Officially termed Prisoner of War Temporary Enclosures (PWTEs for short), they would end up holding as many as two million POWs throughout the summer in often extremely poor conditions. Each camp was built to the same design; open farmland was chosen, conveniently close to a railway line, and enclosed by barbed-wire. The total camp area was sub-divided into ten to twelve smaller zones, each housing five to ten thousand men. Nearby farm buildings were used as the camp kitchen, hospital and administrative centres, and it was down to the prisoners themselves to provide doctors, cooks and work parties. Security was furnished mainly by former Wehrmacht field police who were given extra rations to man the wire. No accommodation was provided for POWs, forcing them to dig crude shelters and caves in the earth in which to sleep and shelter from the elements. Ivar Corneliussen witnessed the makeshift nature of the camps, "The Americans put us all into a POW camp, not that it was a proper camp, it was a big field with some barbed wire, and there was very little supervision, not many guards at all."

The flood of prisoners soon overwhelmed the camps; Camp Remagen, for instance, was built for 100,000 POWs but held 184,000. With no shelter, and rations set at 1,200-1,500 calories per day per man – even though this often wasn't met – malnutrition and disease soon set in and prisoners began to die. Unlike in Nazi camps this wasn't official policy, but rather the unfortunate result of a system struggling to cope. To shield themselves from accusations of mistreatment, Dwight Eisenhower decreed that the men in the camps weren't officially prisoners of war, but were instead 'disarmed enemy forces', meaning they weren't covered under the Geneva Conventions. Regardless of the legal niceties, by the Allies' own admission between three and six thousand prisoners died in the camps, although the true figure was probably quite a lot higher.

Processing and release

Screening of prisoners began immediately to ascertain their rank, branch of service, and any involvement in war crimes. Officers were subject to lengthy and repeated interrogations, and members of the Waffen-SS were also singled out for special treatment as Andreas Fleischer saw in his camp, "One day an American officer with a loudspeaker appeared and called out to us 'All Wehrmacht men go over there to the left, and all Waffen-SS men to the right'. We all went where we were told, and it turned out there were more than 200 of us Waffen-SS – that shocked them, especially as the camp had a rule that the guard had to be doubled if there was even just one Waffen-SS man in it. American soldiers would then come up and stare at us through the wire like we were animals in a zoo." Leo Wilm described what Waffen-SS membership could mean in the west, "During an interrogation by the Americans I was given a beating because I had been assigned to anti-partisan duties." Harsh though this was, it was far worse in the east as one SS man described, "Most of the division was handed over by the Americans to the Russians and sent to the gulags. I had a friend who was with them … he once saw a Russian tank shoot down 500 SS men because they couldn't work anymore, that was the rule, if you couldn't work you were shot." Another retold, "In one of the many camps I went through, I saw two men walking in step with one another. The Russian guards immediately grabbed them and checked for the blood group tattoo all Waffen-SS men had. They found it and shot them on the spot."

Despite these cruelties in both east and west, prisoners began to be released within a few weeks of the end of the war. Female personnel and teenaged Hitler Youth were usually the first, swiftly followed by those deemed necessary to help rebuilding – farmers and miners being top of the list. Following French demands, over 180,000 POWs were sent to France as forced labour, but by the end of June 1945 several of the Rheinwiesenlager, including Remagen, were closed down. As for the east, by the end of 1946 the Soviet Union held fewer POWs than the United Kingdom, the United States and France combined, but it didn't release the last of them until 1956.



Czech insurgents during the Prague Uprising, May 1945

“IN THE CZECH CAPITAL, THE REBELS CLUNG ON TO THEIR LAST POSITIONS. AT 5.00AM ON 7 MAY, GERMAN ARMOURED VEHICLES BREACHED THE BARRICADES AND INFANTRY BROKE INTO THE TOWN HALL”

FINAL BATTLE: PRAGUE UPRISING

Even as the victory in Europe was being celebrated around the world, Czech resistance fighters launched a final attack on German occupiers in their country's capital

WORDS **MICHAEL JONES**

On 8 May 1945, America, Britain and most other European countries were happily celebrating VE Day. On the same day, Czech insurgents were fighting for their lives. Amid the heady rush of events at the war's end, the Prague uprising usually receives scant attention – and unjustly so. It is a story full of unexpected twists and turns, where courage and heroism triumphed against all military odds.

The Czechs had suffered the longest period of occupation in Europe and yearned to be free of the Nazi yoke. The Germans had annexed the Sudetenland in October 1938, and occupied the remainder of the country in March 1939, setting up an independent, pro-Fascist republic in Slovakia and forging the remnants into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. After the assassination of Hitler's henchman SS General Reinhard Heydrich (the region's brutal Protector) in Prague in the summer of 1942 the Germans butchered thousands of Czech citizens in reprisal. After the death of Hitler, the country's underground movement made preparations for a revolt against Nazi rule. Its focal point would be the Czech capital.

The uprising began shortly after midday on 5 May with a fight for the Radio Building in the centre of Prague. Once the rebels were in control, at 12.33pm, an appeal for help went out, "Calling all Czechs! Calling all Czechs! Come to our aid immediately." The leader of the revolt was 50-year-old General Karel Kutlvasr, a member of the Czech resistance, a brave and skilful soldier – and above all, a patriot. The Protectorate guard and city police joined him, capturing the nearby telephone exchange, railway station and main post office. The first German attacks were beaten off, with Kutlvasr directing the insurgents through the police communications system. By 4.00pm fighting had spread all over Prague, with thousands of civilians flinging up barricades to block the enemy's progress.

Prague's Wehrmacht garrison had initially retreated. But the rebels were short of weapons and there were well-equipped SS units all around the city. On the morning of 6 May the Germans counter-attacked in strength, bringing in tanks, artillery and air support. That afternoon, Kutlvasr and his fellow fighters were pushed back to their last defences. To hold on, they desperately needed support from one of the Allied armies converging on the Reich, for the city lay between advancing American and Russian forces.

On 6 May all eyes were on the Americans. General George Patton's Third Army had advanced into Czechoslovakia from Austria, capturing Pilsen, and Patton now wanted to aid the rebels, pushing his reconnaissance units towards the Czech capital. "Those patriots in the city need our help!" he exclaimed. "We have no time to lose." But a demarcation line further west had already been agreed with the Russians and General Eisenhower forbade him to cross it. "I doubt the wisdom of this," a frustrated Patton confided to his diary. Soviet Marshal Ivan Konev's First Ukrainian Front, moving towards Prague from southern Germany, would be unable to reach the Czech capital for another three days.

On the evening of 6 May the British government received ULTRA decrypts (an Allied intelligence project which tapped into German military communications) of SS radio transmissions in Prague. "Our tactics of terror are working," they stated with grim satisfaction, "and we will soon be in control of the city." Winston Churchill now contacted General Eisenhower. "I am hoping that your plan does not inhibit you to advance to Prague," the British Prime Minister implored, "if you have the troops and do not meet the Russians earlier." However, Eisenhower refused to budge.

In the Czech capital, the rebels clung on to their last positions. At 5.00am on 7 May, German armoured vehicles breached the barricades and infantry broke into the town hall. The Wehrmacht traded blows with Czech fighters on the staircases and in the corridors, while the wounded, and terrified women and children, stayed huddled in the basement. The Luftwaffe joined the fray, its planes bombing and strafing remaining rebel positions. A column of 30 German tanks assembled outside the SS headquarters, ready to deliver the coup de grâce. The uprising was about to collapse.

But assistance came from a most unexpected quarter. The First Division of the Russian Liberation Army (an anti-communist force formed by renegade General Andrei Vlasov, recruited for the Wehrmacht in the autumn of 1944) fell out with the Germans, and – no longer obeying their instructions – marched south into Czechoslovakia. It then made contact with the Czech resistance. The First Division's commander, General Sergei Bunyachenko sympathised with Prague's plight and wanted to help the insurgents. Bunyachenko's force was equipped with artillery and anti-tank weapons – and on the morning of 7 May, with the SS poised to crush the uprising, his soldiers dramatically entered the battle.

Bunyachenko sent one of his regiments to seize the airport, to stop the Luftwaffe bombing the city and to prevent more reinforcements reaching the SS. Two more blocked the approach roads to Prague, from the north and south. His remaining fighters joined the rebels on the barricades and fought for control of the city centre.

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***Above, left to right:** Soviet General and Marshal of the Soviet Union Ivan Stepanovich Konev as Prague is liberated by Red Army in May 1945*

A plaque to commemorate the victims of the Prague uprising. There are also many plaques to the victims embedded in the streets around the city

A partisan brigade marches through the Powder Tower in Prague. The tower was one of the original city gates and was intended to be an attractive entrance into the city rather than be for defence

Sigismund Diczbalis was one of these soldiers. “Our men fought with desperate ferocity, street by street, house by house,” Diczbalis said. “I remember a platoon of Vlasov soldiers arriving at our barricade,” Antonin Sticha added. “They pushed straight past us and began attacking a nearby German stronghold.” Fighting for Prague’s airport was particularly bloody. Bunyachenko’s men clashed with the SS on the runways and brought up their artillery to fire on the German planes. By evening the airport was in the Russian Liberation Army’s hands. The Germans were driven out of the Old Town Square and the barricades reinforced. “Without the Vlasov forces we would not have held the city on 7 May,” Sticha emphasised. General Bunyachenko and his men had saved Prague.

But a day later, in a remarkable turnaround, the renegade Russian force was suddenly ordered to leave. On 7 May Radio Prague hailed them as heroes. On 8 May the pro-communist Military Council, co-ordinating the uprising with General Kutlvasr, demanded they go. The council knew that the Red Army was rapidly approaching and they loathed the Vlasov forces. “In a matter of hours our euphoria – a belief that we were engaged in a historic and important struggle – changed to despondency,” said Sigismund Diczbalis. “At first General Bunyachenko, in the thick of the street fighting, simply did not believe it. But after a while it sank in, and he ordered our immediate withdrawal.”

As the Vlasov forces departed westwards, in an attempt to reach American lines, the Germans launched a powerful new offensive, “At about 11.00am on 8 May the SS attacked our area in force,” Antonin Sticha recalled. “We pulled back towards the town square once more. It was terrible – everything was ablaze. There was a ceaseless din of tank and artillery fire.”

German troops broke through into the Old Town Square, in even greater strength. They began shelling the last bastions of Czech resistance, the Old Town Hall and Radio Building. Soon the town hall was in flames and part of the structure collapsed. The Radio Building was hit by over 40 shells. The SS and the Wehrmacht began rounding up and shooting civilians. Women and children were herded in front of German armoured vehicles and used as human shields. More and more troops pushed past the barricades and converged on the city centre. They were closing in for the kill.

At 1.00pm Prague’s Military Council held another emergency meeting. The underground passages that ran from the town hall offered an escape route, but there was a mass of wounded in the building. Rather than abandon them, the defenders resolved to fight to the death. Small groups of insurgents, armed with bazookas, were sent out into the square to try to slow the advancing German tanks. Some were teenage boys. “The weapons were easy to use and very effective in city fighting,” Jan Svacina remembered. “They bought us precious time. I saw one 19 year old standing behind the corner of a house. He let a tank go right past him, then stepped out and blew it up with one bazooka shot.”

However, at 3.00pm the town hall was completely in flames and its roof had collapsed. Fighting was going on in the building and the square outside it. “We were living by the hour, by the minute,” Antonin Sticha said. “Only one thought was in our minds – to hold off the Germans.”

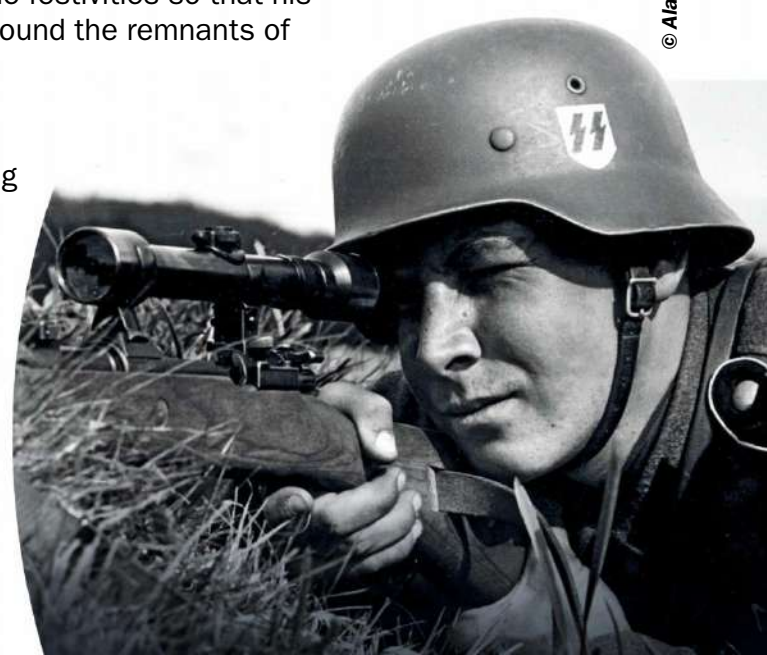
But at 4.15pm another little miracle occurred. General Rudolph Toussaint, the Wehrmacht commander in Prague, received reports of the rapid approach of the leading Soviet forces. Toussaint and his men had no wish to surrender to the Red Army. Instead, he decided to move westwards without further delay, in an attempt to reach the Americans. To bring this about, Toussaint opened negotiations with the insurgents. He offered to halt the fighting in return for safe passage out of the city. At 6.00pm an agreement was reached – and the leading column of German troops left Prague 15 minutes later. Against all odds, the Czech capital had survived.

The first Red Army units reached Prague at 6.00am on 9 May. Their main force arrived four hours later. The few diehard SS units holding out in the city were quickly dealt with. “We now knew that we were safe,” Antonin Sticha said. “At about 10.00am a column of Soviet tanks rumbled past us. I remember a Russian soldier, sitting atop one of the vehicles, machine gunning a German sniper position. To him, it was a simple reflex action.”

On 9 May 1945, Russian soldiers were welcomed as liberators. However, these celebrations were quite brief. Marshal Ivan Konev cut short the festivities so that his soldiers could push on and surround the remnants of Germany’s Army Group Centre.

Over the following years, Czechoslovakia would endure more suffering, with the crushing of the ‘Prague spring’ in 1968. But its brave uprising against Nazi oppression in May 1945 deserves to be remembered with respect.

“WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE HERDED IN FRONT OF GERMAN ARMOURED VEHICLES AND USED AS HUMAN SHIELDS”



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***Right:** An SS sniper takes aim*

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THE UNION'S SOUTHERN ROCK

GEORGE HENRY THOMAS

A Virginian fighting for the North, this general showed remarkable tenacity, foresight and dependability during the American Civil War

WORDS **MARC DESANTIS**

Born on 31 July 1816, and hailing from Southampton County, Virginia, George Henry Thomas won a seat at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Entering in 1836, his roommate there was William Tecumseh Sherman, a man whom he would one day serve alongside in the American Civil War of 1861-1865.

Graduating in the class of 1840, Thomas was commissioned as a second lieutenant of artillery and was soon in combat against the Seminoles, a tribe of Native Americans, in Florida. He would later serve as an artillery officer during the Mexican-American War (1845-1848). His handling of artillery was instrumental in enabling the capture of Monterey in September 1846, and earned him a promotion to captain. In February 1847, Thomas's gunners prevented the collapse of the American flank at the Battle of Buena Vista, holding on long enough for reinforcements to arrive.

After the war, and now a major, Thomas went back to West Point in 1851 to serve as the head cavalry and artillery instructor. He would also marry, taking as his wife a New York woman named Frances Kellogg. Thomas won the respect of the cadets for his evenhanded application of discipline. Not all of them were pleased with his riding instruction, however. Thomas would not let his cadets let loose, insisting that they trot their horses instead of gallop, as they had expected, and wished. Thomas saw this as a chance to cultivate discipline in them, since they expected to charge. This insistence on obedience to orders was in line with Thomas's own approach to war: disciplined, detail-oriented, prepared and thorough.

Thomas was subsequently posted to command an artillery battalion at Fort Yuma in the blisteringly hot Arizona Territory, in 1854, followed by a stint in command of the Second Cavalry Regiment, with whom he battled Kiowa and Comanche Native Americans in Texas.

The Civil War begins

Thomas had so far spent his adult life in the military, proving himself to be a capable and conscientious soldier, never entering into the realm of politics. By 1860, however, politics would intrude upon his life. Stark, irreconcilable regional differences over slavery had boiled over with the election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency that November. Several Southern states seceded from the Union, though his home state of Virginia had yet to do so.

With the firing on the Federal-held (Union) Fort Sumter on 12 April 1861 by South Carolina state troops, and President Lincoln's call for 75,000 volunteers to put down the incipient rebellion, Virginia also seceded. The 44-year-old Thomas had to choose between his home and the oath he had made to the US Army. Would his loyalty be to his state or his country?

Thomas decided that he must remain true to the United States. This decision would see him vilified by other Southerners, and derided as a 'Virginia renegade'. His principled stand would also create an unhealable rift between him and his pro-secession sisters back in Virginia. They refused forever after to speak to their brother again, and turned his portrait to face the wall of their home.

Thomas was a stark, albeit not unique, anomaly. Like General Winfield Scott, also a native of Virginia, and supreme commander of the United States (Union) Army at the war's start, he was a Southerner fighting against the South. Against the rebellious Confederates, Thomas showed steel. Dispatched to the battleground state of Kentucky by Lincoln after Sherman had personally assured the president of his loyalty, Thomas, a brigadier general, engaged a Confederate army at Mills Springs on 19 January 1862. Thomas's soldiers worsted the enemy, who fled, winning eastern Kentucky for the Union.

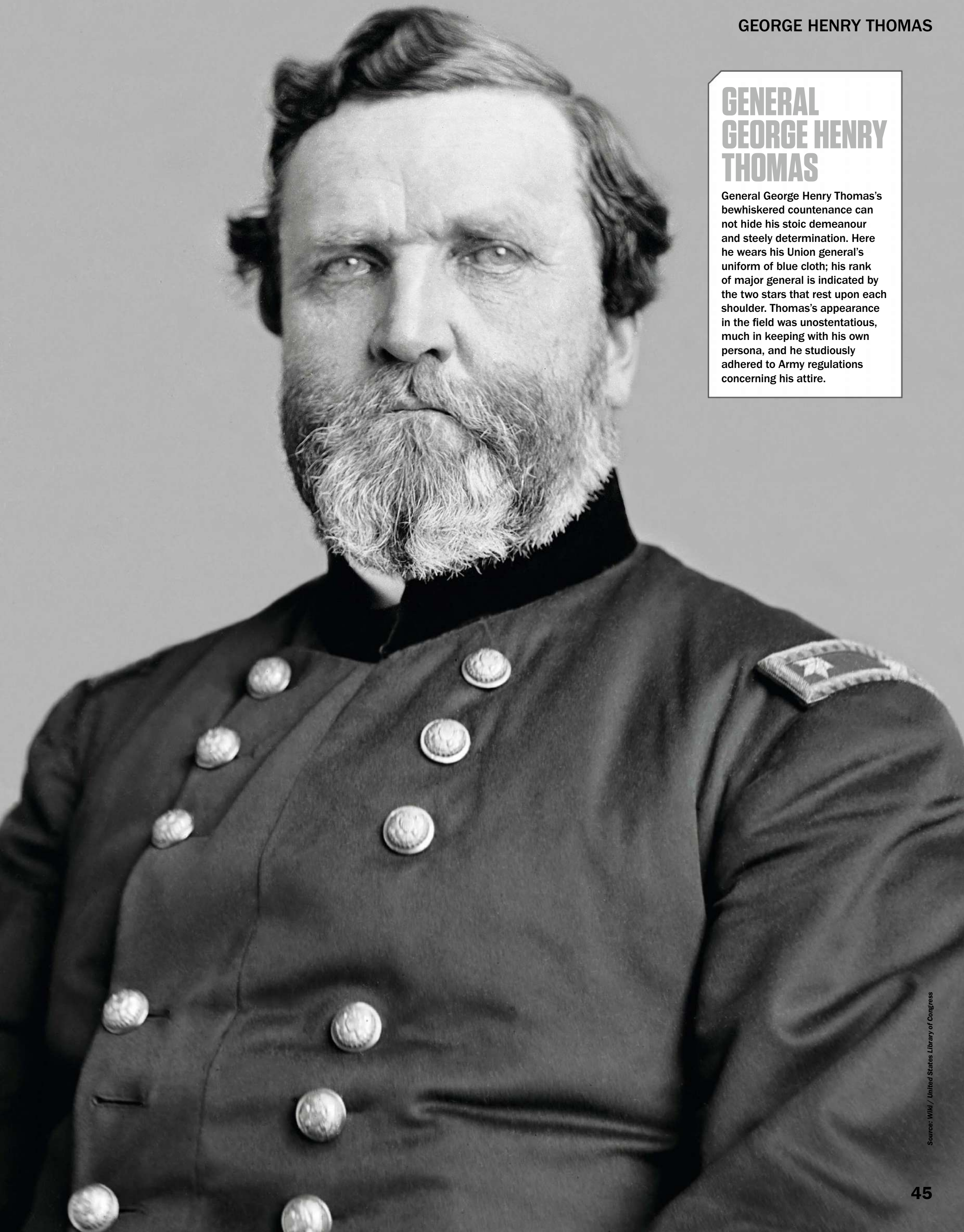
At the Battle of Stones River (Murfreesboro) in Tennessee on 31 December 1862, Thomas, now a major general, commanded the centre of the Federal line, which he skilfully held. After a day's ferocious fighting, he attended a war council with his superior, Major General William Rosecrans. When Thomas heard the word 'retreat' spoken, he growled back, "This army does not retreat."

Neither would Rosecrans countenance a withdrawal, and the next day found the Confederate commander, General Braxton Bragg, being nonplussed by the failure of the Federals to depart, as he had made no plans to continue the fight. The stubborn Union army hung on until Bragg began his own retreat south on 3 January 1863.

Bragg eluded Rosecrans's pursuit after Stones River, leaving Tennessee almost

GENERAL GEORGE HENRY THOMAS

General George Henry Thomas's bewhiskered countenance can not hide his stoic demeanour and steely determination. Here he wears his Union general's uniform of blue cloth; his rank of major general is indicated by the two stars that rest upon each shoulder. Thomas's appearance in the field was unostentatious, much in keeping with his own persona, and he studiously adhered to Army regulations concerning his attire.



Source: Wiki / United States Library of Congress

entirely to the Northerners. Rosecrans's next target was Chattanooga, Tennessee. Thomas crossed the Tennessee River and astutely placed his army to threaten Bragg's line of communications, forcing him to leave Chattanooga altogether to the Federals.

The Rock of Chickamauga

Rosecrans continued to follow after Bragg, who pretended to be in pell-mell flight. Instead, the Confederate commander intended to trap the Army of the Cumberland in the mountains. This attempt failed however, and the armies next met each other at the slender stream called Chickamauga, which in the Cherokee language meant the 'River of Blood'.

Bragg opened the engagement on 18 September with a thrust at the Federal left wing over the river. By the next day, the bulk of the Confederate army was over the Chickamauga, moving through the tree-shrouded wilderness, with the goal of cutting the Union line of retreat back to Chattanooga. Rosecrans stretched his line further to the left, and also had Thomas's Fourteenth Corps march even further north to extend the Federal line on that wing.

Knowing that the Southerners had crossed the Chickamauga to the Union side, Thomas launched his own attack. Thomas's troops, of the XIV Corps, crashed into the enemy, but soon discovered that Confederate numbers were far greater than initially thought. The Confederates began to drive away the outgunned Federals. Thomas sent in another of his divisions, which brought stability to the Union line. Both sides blasted away on the smoky, heavily-wooded battlefield. Thomas's men stood firm, defeating a Southern charge in brutal hand-to-hand combat before darkness put an end to the day's fighting.

On the following day, the main weight of the Confederate fell on Thomas. He

"THOMAS THEN LEARNED TO HIS HORROR THAT THE FEDERAL RIGHT WING HAD BEEN EVISCERATED, AND HAD BEEN REPLACED BY A HUGE MASS OF ENEMY TROOPS. THERE COULD BE NO THOUGHT OF RETREAT"

requested reinforcements to prevent an enemy breakthrough, but Rosecrans's misunderstanding of where his divisions were resulted in the Union commander issuing a nearly-fatal order. The resulting shift in Federal troops created a yawning gap in the Union line, allowing 11,000 Confederates to pour in and cause havoc.

Thomas then learned to his horror that the Federal right wing had been eviscerated, and had been replaced by a huge mass of enemy troops. There could be no thought of retreat. The Southerners would simply run down the Federals as they fled. Thomas held his ground on Snodgrass Ridge, a series of hills and ridges that provided him with a defensive edge.

The Confederates pounded against Thomas, seeking to outflank him, but his men held firm. Reinforcements eventually arrived, and together with Thomas's exhausted soldiers they repulsed the enemy.

Thomas would now have to save the rest of the Army of the Cumberland from annihilation. He carefully extricated his troops and with Rosecrans's permission (Rosecrans was now far away from the battlefield, back in Chattanooga) and deftly withdrew the battered remnants of the Union army to Chattanooga, where he took up a defensive position.

Though the Confederates had won the battle, Thomas's cool-headedness had prevented a complete disaster. The Union army had not been obliterated, as had been a distinct possibility not too long before. With the Federals still ensconced in Chattanooga, the state of Tennessee remained firmly in Union hands, while the Confederates, who had suffered heavy losses themselves, had to retire to Georgia to lick their many wounds.

For his stalwart defence of the line, Thomas was hailed as the 'Rock of Chickamauga'. Thomas's sense of honour was such that he would not allow himself to be named to replace the blundering Rosecrans. Instead, another would be placed in charge of Union forces in the Western Theater: Ulysses S. Grant.

Chattanooga

Lionised for his capture of Vicksburg in July 1863, Grant was a proven winner, someone that Lincoln had been struggling in vain to find since the beginning of the war two years before. Grant was ordered west to take command of the Western Theater, becoming the ranking general there, with Thomas as his subordinate. Grant ordered Thomas to hold the now-besieged Chattanooga "at all hazards". Thomas promised in reply that he would do so until "we starve".

Thomas quickly turned Chattanooga into a fortress and improved its supply situation. He then restored the fighting spirit of the broken Army of the Cumberland after its thrashing at Chickamauga. Thomas cooperated with Grant and his chief lieutenant, Sherman, Thomas's former West Point roommate, to capture Missionary Ridge, overlooking Chattanooga, on 25 November. It was Thomas's soldiers who led the way, taking the position by frontal assault

The Battle of Stones River was fought from 31 December, 1862 to 2 January 1863, in Middle Tennessee

© Getty

Source: Wiki / National Numismatic Collection, National Museum of American History

Thomas's image appeared on a US five-dollar note in 1890

A 200lb cannon on Missionary Ridge, overlooking Chattanooga

© Getty

Missionary Ridge was captured by Thomas and his chief lieutenant, William Sherman

in a gallant rush. Chattanooga, and with it Tennessee, had been preserved for the Union.

Thomas was proposed as a possible successor to General Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac, who, although he had been victorious at Gettysburg in the summer, had done little against the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia in the ensuing months. Thomas's innate modesty would not allow him to remain under consideration. He protested that the pressure he would labour under would "destroy me in a week". Thomas was content to remain where he was, in command of the Army of the Cumberland. This was a force that he had himself moulded, having picked its officers, weeding out the poor-performers, keeping those that were capable, and training its rank-and-file.

Thomas's milieu would soon change. Having found Grant, Lincoln summoned him back east in March 1864 to become the general-in-chief of all Union armies. William Sherman took over Grant's old post in the west, with Thomas becoming his subordinate.

Thomas's logistical brilliance made it possible for him to supply his own Army of the Cumberland, as well as the Union's Army of the Tennessee and the Army of the Ohio. These supplies were collected and then disbursed out of the giant rail hub at Nashville, food and ammunition going to the tens of thousands of Union troops in the west. Thomas's attention to detail, and his solving of the problem of rail transport, also enabled him to stockpile supplies for the coming campaign of 1864.

"SHERMAN WOULD NOW EMBARK UPON HIS EPIC 'MARCH TO THE SEA', IN WHICH HE WRECKED AND RUINED WHATEVER HE COULD TO DESTROY THE SOUTH'S ABILITY TO CONTINUE THE WAR"

On to Atlanta

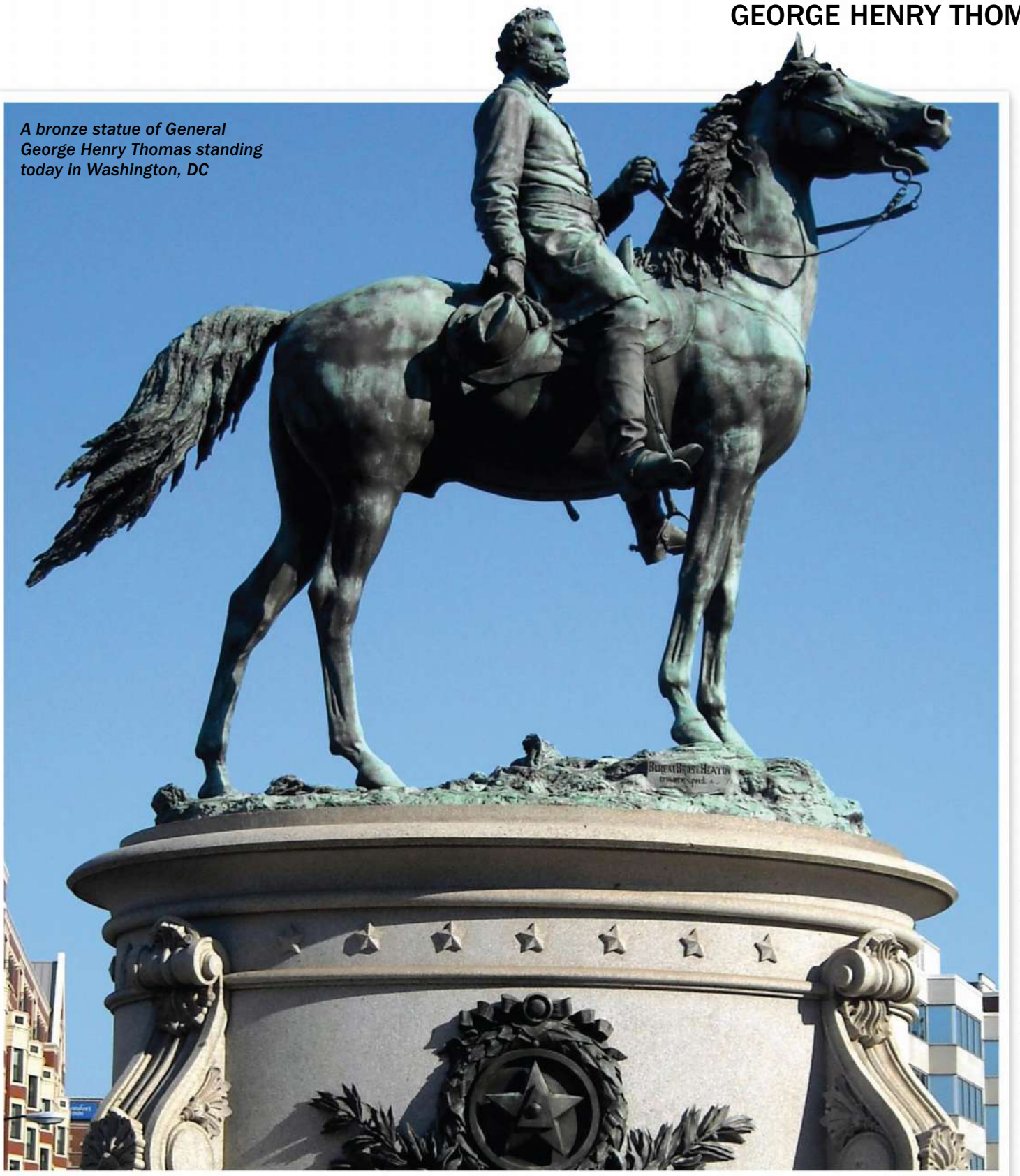
For the campaign to take Atlanta, Georgia, Sherman relied on the Army of the Cumberland to form the centre of his line, with the other two armies to either side. The first target was the Confederate mountain stronghold at Dalton, Georgia. Thomas's troops had the best maps their commander could provide, and they carried prebuilt bridges to let them cross rivers rapidly. Thomas's headquarters was second-to-none in its sophistication and professionalism, with his staff officers using modern communication technology, the telegraph, and incorporating the information provided by scouts and spies into the army's operational planning.

This was all in keeping with Thomas's deliberate, careful, and scientific approach to battle. "The fate of an army may depend on a buckle," Thomas once said, and so the Virginian, observed one of his staff officers, would ensure that his troops were "well-supplied, well-fed, well-looked after, and always brought to the right place at the right time". Sherman himself would make use of Thomas's headquarters, a testament to the Virginian's preparedness and organisational skill.

Sherman, sadly, was often critical of what he perceived to be Thomas's slowness. The Army of the Cumberland, he would complain to Grant, would not move quickly enough for his taste. Sherman believed Thomas too often played it safe. For his own part, Thomas would not expose his troops to needless risks. His was a careful and deliberate way of making war.

On 20 July 1864, during the Union drive on Atlanta, Thomas met the Confederate army under General John Bell Hood at the Battle of

Source: Wiki / United States Library of Congress



A bronze statue of General George Henry Thomas standing today in Washington, DC

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Peachtree Creek, hammering the enemy with his artillery until their assault petered out. The relentless Union advance soon levered the Confederates from Atlanta, which was captured by Federal troops on 2 September.

Sherman would now embark upon his epic 'March to the Sea', in which he wrecked and ruined whatever he could to destroy the South's ability to continue the war. Thomas would not accompany him. Sherman took many of Thomas's best troops from the Army of the Cumberland, leaving Thomas behind in charge of the Western Department, with just a handful of troops, the IV Corps. Thomas was expected to use these men to run down Confederate General John Bell Hood's Army of Tennessee, which had departed Atlanta and was at-large. Thomas's reinforcements, in the meanwhile, amounted to a mere 12,000 untrained recruits.

Nashville

Hood helped Thomas greatly by winning a pyrrhic victory over a Union force at the Battle of Franklin in Tennessee on 30 November 1864, doing much to blunt the fighting power of his own force. Grant, back east, misunderstood the situation in the west, and ordered Thomas to attack the Army of the Tennessee immediately. Thomas wanted to wait until he had secured adequate remounts for his debilitated cavalry arm. A frustrated Grant did not comprehend this need, and insisted on an attack.

Thomas moved to oblige Grant, but an ice storm stalled any further action. Again, Grant did not understand the conditions on the ground, and was on the verge of ordering Thomas's relief from command when news came of the Army of the Cumberland's devastating victory at Nashville, in which Thomas smashed Hood's Army of Tennessee on 15-16 December 1864. For this grand achievement, Thomas would win another accolade: 'Sledgehammer of Nashville'.

Despite this, Grant was still not satisfied with Thomas's aggressiveness, or perceived lack thereof. Grant wanted Thomas to pursue Hood and annihilate him utterly. That was more difficult than Grant could understand, given the conditions that prevailed, and the Union's supreme commander would fume endlessly about Thomas's alleged slowness. Thomas was actually waging war methodically, but it garnered him little respect from Grant.

Finale

The Battle of Nashville earned Thomas a promotion to the rank of major general in the regular United States Army. It also was a dagger in the heart of Confederate hopes. Nonetheless, Grant, displeased with Thomas, took away many of the troops he had used to win the battle, intending that they be employed by other commanders to bring the war to a successful end.

That conclusion came in April 1865, with the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox, followed by those of the remaining Confederate armies. The sweeping Union victory would be blighted by the assassination of Lincoln, shot by while attending a play in Washington, DC.

After the war, Thomas refused to enter politics, despite the urging of others to do so. He died on 28 March 1870, at the age of 53. His post-war military reputation was not enhanced either by his abhorrence of self-promotion or by his decision to destroy his personal papers. He also failed to compose a memoir, as other Union generals did, and thus did not leave the kind of material for historians to mine for use in his defence against charges of slowness that emanated from others, including Grant. Thomas's reputation in modern times, however, has undergone a renaissance, and today he is properly accounted to have been one of the Union's best generals.

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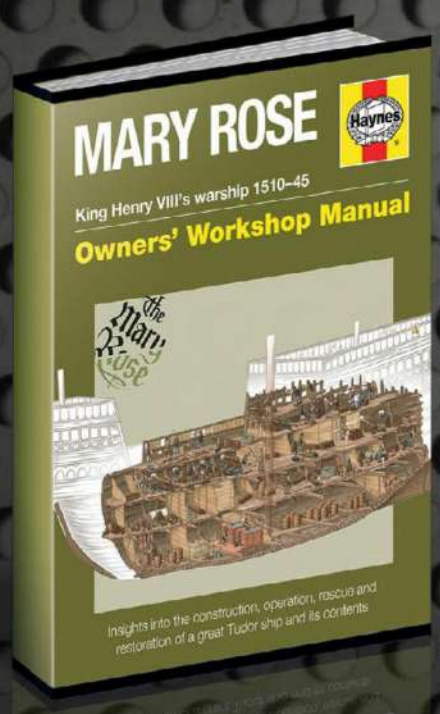

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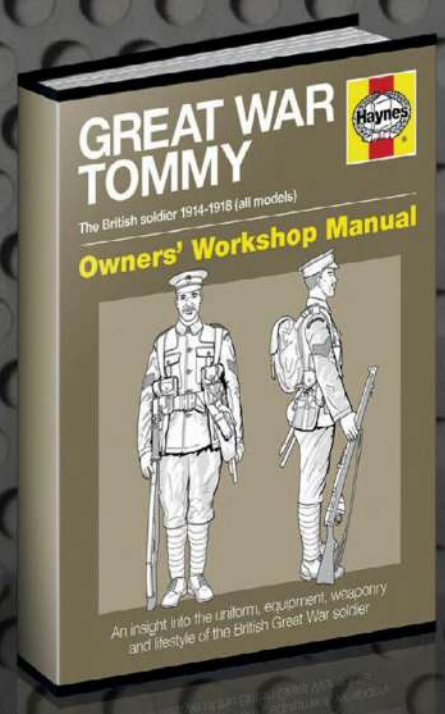

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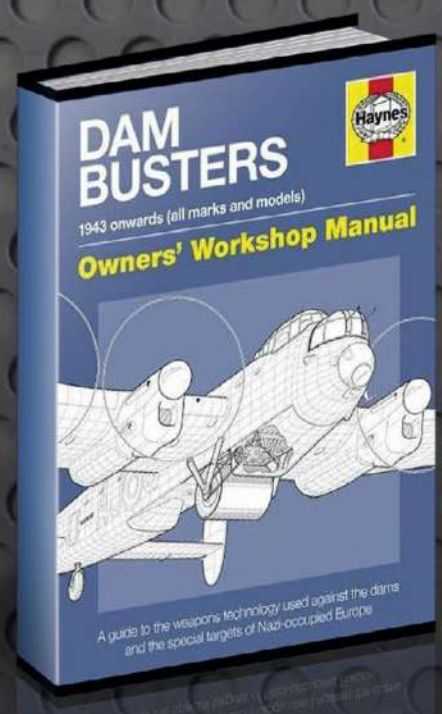

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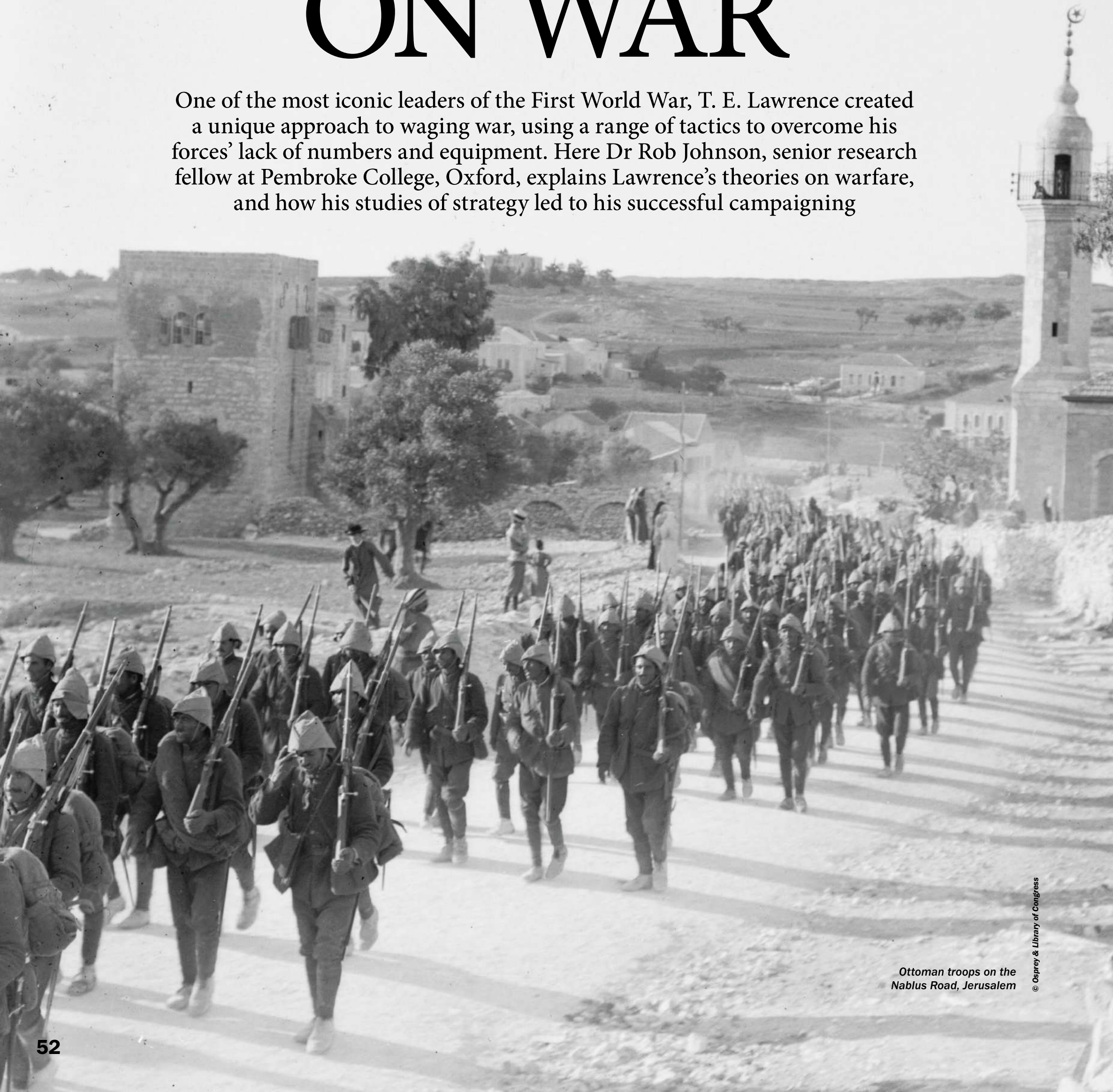
LAWRENCE 'OF ARABIA' ON WAR

One of the most iconic leaders of the First World War, T. E. Lawrence created a unique approach to waging war, using a range of tactics to overcome his forces' lack of numbers and equipment. Here Dr Rob Johnson, senior research fellow at Pembroke College, Oxford, explains Lawrence's theories on warfare, and how his studies of strategy led to his successful campaigning



Ottoman troops on the Nablus Road, Jerusalem

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Thomas Edward Lawrence, better known as 'Lawrence of Arabia', famously generated ideas where insurgents could defeat a regular army. In reality, at the time, he was dependent on the intervention of much larger air and land forces. Sent to liaise with Arab irregular forces fighting the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, Lawrence is considered the intellectual grandfather of guerrilla warfare. His reputation is legendary, but all of his achievements were limited to the context in which he operated and were never easily transferred to later periods. So are any of his ideas still valid?

Lawrence recognised that the traditional military emphasis was on concentrating maximum force against the strongest element of the enemy, to bring about a decisive battle, and to complete operations in the shortest time in order to avoid the exhaustion of limited resources. Lawrence stood this idea on its head. He minimised the focus on troop numbers and quality of equipment, in favour of pressure on the basic necessities of the enemy (food, water, rest) and even greater stress on the cognitive and psychological. Lawrence tried to use space and time to his advantage, to make his Arab partners elusive by using the depth of the desert, and, ultimately, to make the Ottoman soldier afraid of his environment.

The war in the desert was a hard struggle involving great nerve against a more numerous and better-armed Ottoman adversary under harsh climatic conditions. To survive, Lawrence encouraged raiding against the railway lines that supplied Ottoman forces, while trying to keep his partners out of reach of patrols or larger formations. The campaign was therefore one of hit-and-run raids, dynamiting and sniping. Crucially, the Arab fighters could not be entirely certain of the allegiance of their own people so there was a constant threat of betrayal. The Ottomans attempted to undermine the insurgents by recruiting Arab partners of their own and by references to Islamic obligations or loyalties to the Caliph. For this reason, alignments in the campaign were fluid. This was a conflict where maintaining morale and local intelligence were critical to success.

The Ottomans responded to Arab raids with reprisals against civilians. The result was a stalemate: Arab revolutionaries could not take the defended settlements the Ottomans chose to hold, but equally the Ottomans could not spare the manpower to inflict a decisive defeat on the Arabs. The deadlock was broken in 1917-18 when British Imperial forces under General Allenby, defeated the Ottomans at Gaza, in the Judean Hills, and finally at Megiddo (the Biblical Armageddon), which turned the tide. While the Arab forces in the south maintained their blockade of the Ottoman Medina garrison, Lawrence and northern Arab forces, now equipped with supporting armoured cars, machine-gun teams and aircraft, severed crucial rail links, made assaults on some defended railway junctions and then attacked the retreating Ottoman forces in the final stages of the campaign.

Lawrence had been successful at winning and sustaining a network of fighters by working through local leaders. Meanwhile, his campaign of deception and demoralisation through attacks on the fabric and infrastructure of enemy resources had contributed to keeping the resistance alive. But raiding was a high-risk activity. Local forces were often very unreliable and there were frequent disputes between them. Ultimately the success of the revolt was really dependent on General Allenby's vast Egyptian Expeditionary Force. If the Allied conventional forces had been defeated, it is unclear how Lawrence's resistance could have survived at all.

"HIS CAMPAIGN OF DECEPTION AND DEMORALISATION THROUGH ATTACKS ON THE FABRIC AND INFRASTRUCTURE OF ENEMY RESOURCES HAD CONTRIBUTED TO KEEPING THE RESISTANCE ALIVE"

Lawrence had considered the strengths and weaknesses of insurgents carefully. He believed war was not an entirely random and chaotic activity, because there were systems, or principles, which could be applied. He admitted the importance of a grounding in military theory when he was so inexperienced and had not the 'intuition' of veteran officers. Despite making use of a great variety of classical, Medieval and modern texts on war, Lawrence believed there were common linear 'steps' and a necessary sequential approach to strategy and operations. He wrote, "Of course, I had read the usual books (too many books) … but I had never thought myself into the mind of a real commander compelled to fight a campaign of his own."

When the Arab irregulars initially faced defeat at the hands of Ottoman forces in pitched battles, Lawrence advised they move the base of their operations up the coast of the Hejaz where they could be protected by the Royal Navy. He believed this manoeuvre forced the Ottomans to pull back all the way to Medina to avoid their flank becoming threatened. As a result, the threat of Arab irregular attacks on logistics lines was to be used to create an ever-extending flank against the Ottomans. If the Ottoman commanders felt that their lines of communication, which ran from Medina to Syria, could be cut, they would be compelled to post larger and larger numbers of men to protect them. If the Arabs could remain concealed, and strike at points along this elastic line, then Lawrence believed he could fix the Ottomans and absorb their greater mass in inert defence.

Lawrence's observations on the psychological effect of guerrilla operations then developed. He claimed that the unfavourable military situation he had observed compelled him to reconsider the relative importance of material and psychological factors. He wrote, "In each [tactics and strategy] I found the same elements, one algebraic, one biological, a third psychological. The first seemed a pure science, subject to the laws of mathematics, without humanity." This element dealt with time, space, fixed conditions, topography, railways and munitions.

Lawrence calculated that the Ottomans could not defend the 140,000 square miles of Arabia, particularly if the Arab forces were "a thing invulnerable, intangible, without front or back, drifting about like a gas". He surmised that armies were "like plants, immobile as a whole, firm rooted, nourished through long stems to the head. We [the Arab forces] might be a vapour, blowing where we listed. Our kingdoms lay in each man's mind, and as we wanted nothing material to live on, so perhaps we offered nothing material to the killing".

Lawrence was saying, in effect, that as long as a population and a revolutionary force was free to manoeuvre and remain concealed, appearing as ephemeral "as a gas", it could retain the initiative. The ability to strike at any point would act constantly on the mind of the enemy, but would not trouble the insurgent,

A view east of Aqaba, Jordan. Lawrence's guerrilla tactics were tested in similarly rough terrain

An aerial photograph over the River Jordan. Understanding the topography of the region was vital to victory

A view of the Jordan Valley taken by a reconnaissance aircraft. This was ideal terrain for hit-and-run tactics

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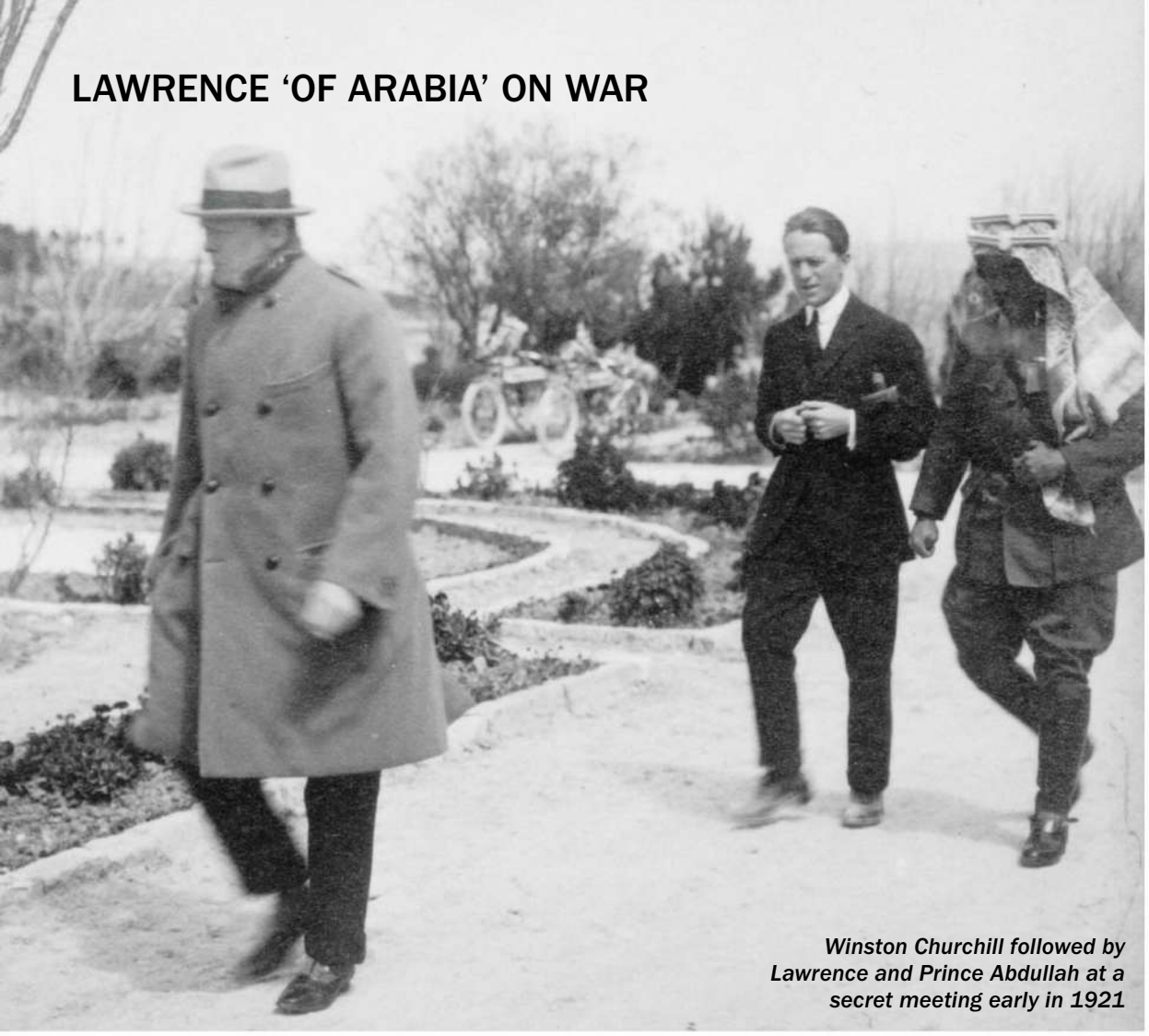
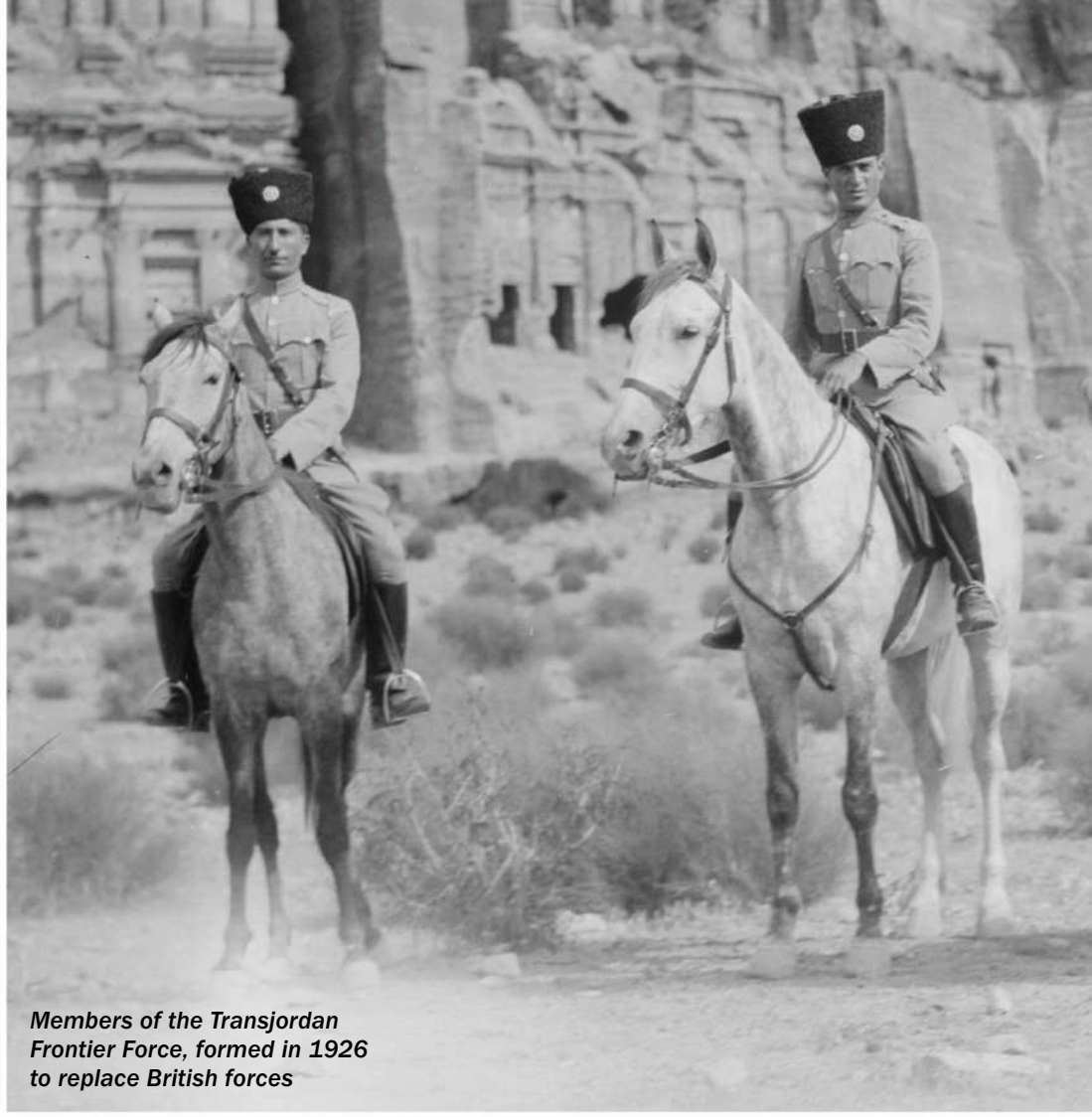


Winston Churchill followed by Lawrence and Prince Abdullah at a secret meeting early in 1921



Members of the Transjordan Frontier Force, formed in 1926 to replace British forces

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who could choose the time and place of his brief exposure to risk. Where, in conventional war, Lawrence noted that “both forces [are] striving to keep in touch to avoid tactical surprise”, by contrast, he noted that, in guerrilla warfare “our war [was] a war of detachment: we were to contain the enemy by the silent threats of a vast unknown desert, not disclosing ourselves to the moment of attack”.

The ‘ways’ of minimising casualties, while still creating the psychological effect, was “unconscious habit of never engaging the enemy at all” and thus not giving the Ottoman troops any targets. The prerequisite was excellent intelligence, and judgment whether to make a strike, or wait until better opportunities arose. In the guerrilla phase of his campaign, in 1917 and early 1918, this was largely true, although he was engaged in some minor skirmishes, and then, in later 1918, his Arab partners were involved in much more sustained conventional fighting.

Bionomics, the supply question, had a part to play in the campaign. Soldiers must eat and drink, and for Lawrence the Ottomans’ supplies were scarce and precious: consequently, his objective was to destroy not the army, but its material support. This included railway lines and bridges, livestock, or water sources to inflict ‘wear and tear’ on the enemy. The biological needs of an army, when affected, could reinforce the psychological effects, which Lawrence believed took precedence. Short of supplies, the Ottoman soldier had to endure the heat, hunger and oppressive silence of the wastes before him, peering endlessly into the shimmering haze or blank night, remaining constantly vigilant, and aware of the ever-present possibility of attack.

Despite the attention focussed on military operations, Lawrence argued that his approach was not really ‘war’ in its classic sense. He speculated that a purely ‘revolutionary’ method might have yielded greater results. The war of detachment, the mobilisation of peoples, and the emphasis on setting an example as the means to educate a population, all these were seized upon by subsequent revolutionary war theorists and some practitioners. Lawrence’s fundamentals of guerrilla warfare had been copied, emulated and adapted ever since, with varying degrees of success.

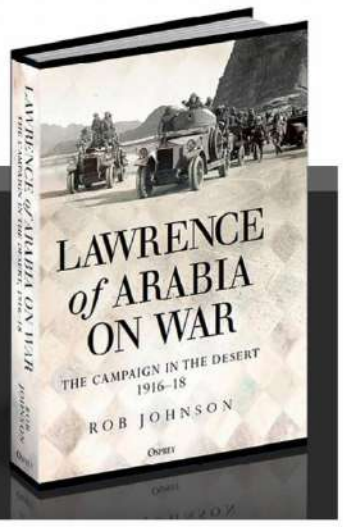
The greater frequency of insurgencies and guerrilla conflicts after 1919, through to recent times, also gave Lawrence’s ideas longevity. As soldiers, revolutionaries, and political leaders sought to understand the mechanisms of revolutionary warfare, so Lawrence’s ideas were evoked again and again. Lawrence’s views on insurgency and partnering with local forces were especially influential in the United States’ campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan after 2001. In the United States Army, one could not escape references to Lawrence’s ‘27 Articles’: his advice for working with indigenous forces. There was an emphasis on the 15th Article, which stated, “Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them.” The unfortunate consequence of this mantra is that it may have created a reluctance to act decisively, lead, or direct when appropriate. The problem with all doctrinal codes is that they can be applied dogmatically rather than as a guideline or suggestion. Lawrence’s ideas are invoked at moments that seem far outside of their context. He was all too aware that local forces can be unreliable or pursue their own agendas. Like axioms on war, derived from other thinkers of the past, they cannot be applied unthinkingly.

But here lies Lawrence’s greatest contribution to military thought and practice. He argued for the understanding of war through intense study and condemned slavish adherence to rules. He was compelled to adapt his own theory when confronted by the harsh reality of war. He identified the value of confidence and morale and understood the importance of intelligence. He accepted that guerrillas could only be a distraction and that alternative ways and means had to be found to have the remotest chance of success. His approach was not limited to psychological warfare and an indirect approach, but a deeper consideration of the situation. He believed in challenging the assumptions and made use of a wide variety of historical cases to seek out the optimum solution. If, in his age, conventional war favoured the defensive, in time, he said, it would eventually shift to the offensive, and orthodox assumptions would have to be rethought. “Back and forth we go,” he concluded wryly. He cautioned against simplified and confident assertions based on a handful of selected cases, claiming that his own ideas were the result of “hard brain work” leavened by equally hard experience.

Lawrence was an advocate, not only of irregular war, but of the diplomacy that was required to convert military action into lasting political change. He was compelled, by force of circumstance, to adapt his approach. In both the conflict and in the peace-making, he was dependent on a particular context, namely the scale and influence of the British forces, to achieve his ends, as his own efforts were not successful. Making use of Lawrence in a superficial way can miss this important aspect of the way in which he operated.

Ultimately, he was an advocate of the comprehensive study of war. Knowing human limits and adapting to the context were his critical contributions to our understanding of war. It is for that reason he concluded that, if we must fight “with two thousand years of experience behind us” there are “no excuses for not fighting well”.

Dr Rob Johnson is the author of *Lawrence of Arabia on War* (Oxford: Osprey, 2020) and the director of the Changing Character of War Centre at the University of Oxford.



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VE Day 75 years on

This year, on May 8, a special programme of events will take place across the United Kingdom to commemorate Allied Victory in Europe and pay tribute to the Second World War generation who served at home and overseas.

Over the bank holiday weekend, as we remember the heroes of the Second World War, Winston Churchill's victory speech will once again resound across the country just as it did 75 years ago. It is scheduled to be rebroadcast in public spaces as part of the VE Day 75th anniversary commemorations. The new £5 Coin issued to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day fittingly depicts Churchill in his own words, taken from that victory speech.

However we choose to mark the occasion, this year's anniversary is a poignant and possibly final opportunity for the nation to give thanks to all those who contributed to a defining moment in history.

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The inspiration behind the VE Day 75th Anniversary £5 Coin: May 8, 1945, Churchill waves to the crowds in Whitehall, on the day he broadcast to the nation that the war with Germany had been won "This is your Victory" he tells the nation.

Churchill £5 Coin issued to mark 75 years since VE Day

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To mark the 75th Anniversary of VE Day in 2020, a new £5 coin has been issued — the VE Day 75th Anniversary £5 coin. The coin features a portrait of Churchill with his iconic V for Victory sign. Implementing an ingenious minting technique his portrait is made from the words of his speech as he addressed the nation on VE Day.

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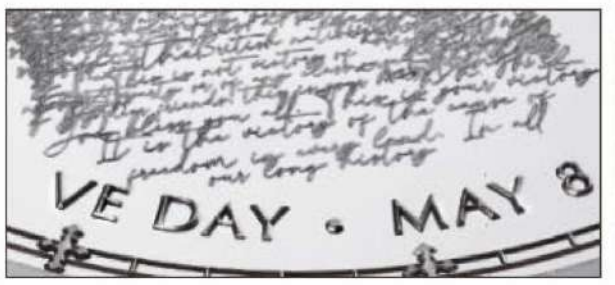

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SHIPKA PASS

Desperate, savage and bloody, the defence of this mountainous position is one of the most epic battles of the 19th century

WORDS **MARK SIMNER**

The Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 was fought between the Russian Empire (more correctly, an Eastern Orthodox coalition led by Russia, which included Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro) and the Ottoman Empire. It was the last, and most important, of a series of conflicts fought between the two empires dating back to the 17th century. Its causes are deep-rooted and complex, but the 1877 conflict began on 24 April, when the Russian Tsar, Alexander II, declared war on the Ottomans to come to the aid of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Bulgaria, who had begun a rebellion against Ottoman rule. It would end in a Russian coalition victory ten months later following a savage campaign that saw tens of thousands killed and countless more wounded. There were several sizeable actions fought during the conflict, one of the most notable being the Battle of Shipka Pass, itself a series of bloody actions fought for control of the vital pass in the Balkan Mountains.

Russian strategy

Bitter experience of earlier conflicts between the Russians and Ottomans had led to Turkey building a string of fortresses to guard its European provinces from future attacks. Nevertheless, Prussian-born Russian General Hans Karl von Diebitsch had managed to break through these formidable defences in 1829 and advance on Constantinople, allowing Russia to dictate subsequent peace terms. In 1877, Russian strategy was simply to repeat Diebitsch's earlier victory.

However, in 1877 Russia was unable to benefit from the naval supremacy it had enjoyed in the earlier campaign, which allowed unopposed amphibious operations and resupply by sea. This was because the Russian Black Sea fleet had scuttled itself at Sevastopol during the disastrous Crimean War, while the subsequent Treaty of Paris of 1856 restricted

OPPOSING FORCES

RUSSIAN

LEADERS
Count Iosif Vladimirovich Romeyko-Gurko and Fyodor Fyodorovich Radetsky

INFANTRY
7,500 (August 1877)

CAVALRY
Five companies of unmounted Cossacks (August 1877)

ARTILLERY
29 guns

VS

OTTOMAN

LEADERS
Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha

INFANTRY
38,000 estimate (August 1877)

CAVALRY
Unknown

ARTILLERY
Unknown

Source: Wiki / PD-Art

SHIPKA PASS

Russian and Bulgarian troops fight a desperate battle to defend the Shipka Pass from repeated Ottoman attacks, August 1877

SHIPKA, BULGARIA JULY 1877 – JANUARY 1878

01 ROUTE OF RUSSIAN ADVANCE
Russian strategy was to march an army of 250,000 men through Romania, cross the Danube – in order to avoid Ottoman fortresses – and seize the passes in the Balkan Mountains. From here, Russian forces would advance on Adrianople and Constantinople to force terms on the Ottomans.

02 CROSSING OF THE DANUBE
The main Russian advance initially went well, with all four corps having crossed the Danube River into Bulgaria by 1 July 1877. However, they soon began to deviate from their original plan by adopting a more broad and slower advance than previously envisioned.

03 GURKO RACES AHEAD
General Gurko advances ahead of the main Russian force with 16,000 men to take possession of the vital passes through the Balkan Mountains. He takes the Khankoi [Hankoi] Pass but is delayed due to some skirmishes with Ottoman forces, which prevents him working in concert with Mirsky.

04 PRINCE MIRSKY'S ADVANCE
Prince Mirsky, commander of the Russian 9th Infantry Division, advances on Shipka Pass and attacks it on 17 July without Gurko's assistance. However, the attack, carried out by 2,000 men of the 36th (Orlovski) Infantry Regiment, supported by Cossacks and artillery, fails to dislodge the Ottoman defenders.

05 GURKO ATTACKS SHIPKA PASS
Gurko advances from the Khankoi Pass and finally arrives at the Shipka Pass on 18 July, immediately attacking it with two infantry battalions supported by two companies of Cossacks. The attack fails but the Ottoman defenders quietly abandon their positions the next day. Shipka Pass is then seized by the Russians.

06 GURKO GOES ON THE OFFENSIVE
Leaving a garrison at Shipka Pass, Gurko advances south towards the town of Kazanlak. On 29 July, his Bulgarian troops clash with an advanced guard of Ottoman forces under Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha at Stara Zagora [Eski-Zagra]. Heavy casualties force Gurko to withdraw via the Khankoi Pass.

07 SÜLEYMAN ATTACKS SHIPKA PASS
Having swelled his army to around 38,000 men, Süleyman advances on the Shipka Pass and attacks the Russian defenders on 21 August. Repeated assaults follow but Ottoman forces are unable to retake the pass. After suffering thousands of killed and wounded, Süleyman departs in September to replace Mehemet Ali.

08 GURKO TAKES SOFIA
In December, the Russian garrison at Shipka Pass learn that the Ottoman defenders at Plevna had finally surrendered. Gurko goes on the offensive, leading an army of over 65,000 men through the Araba Konak Pass, and capturing Sofia on 4 January 1878.

the number and size of vessels Russia could maintain in the Black Sea. Turkey, on the other hand, had built several modern ironclads which Russia could now not counter.

Russian strategy instead focussed on marching an army of 250,000 men through Romania and cross the Danube – the natural border between Russian and Ottoman controlled territories – to avoid Ottoman defences. The Russian army would then advance over the Balkan Mountains to Adrianople, from where it would finally march on Constantinople and again force terms on the Ottoman Empire. Meanwhile, another force would launch a diversionary offensive in the Caucasus to draw off Ottoman troops that might otherwise meet the main Russian thrust towards the Ottoman capital. Alexander knew he needed a quick victory before the Great Powers of Europe could intervene.

Ottoman forces

At the start of the campaign, the Russian Army of the South was organised into four corps, each comprising two infantry and one cavalry divisions with supporting artillery. There is some debate as to the strength of their Ottoman opponents. At the time, Russia estimated that Turkey held around 160,000 troops in Europe, of which 60,000 were at Vidin on the Danube and the remaining 100,000 concentrated around Rushchuk, Silistria, Varna and Shumla. Historians believe the number of Ottoman troops available to oppose the Russian invasion was higher, estimates ranging from 186,000 to over 250,000, although many would be garrisoning forts and not available for field operations.

Unlike Russia, the Ottomans do not appear to have had a strategy for the coming conflict, save for holding their static defensive line formed by the fortresses. The Ottoman high command suffered from internal rivalry, with commanders actively engaged in intrigues against one another. Even when the fighting commenced, these rivalries continued and undermined the Ottoman defence. Nevertheless, Ottoman troops would fight a determined and bloody campaign against the Russians.

Count Iosif Vladimirovich Romeyko-Gurko, who commanded Russian forces operating in and around Shipka Pass

Source: Wiki / PD-Art

Source: Wiki / PD-Art

Above: **Fighting Around Shipka *by Simon Agopyan***

The Russians advance

Initially, the Russians successfully crossed the Danube into Bulgaria as planned, with all four corps over the river by 1 July, although they quickly began to deviate from their original strategy by adopting a broader, slower advance. Nevertheless, General Iosif Vladimirovich Gurko was ordered to race ahead of the main Russian army with 16,000 men – including the 4th Rifle Brigade, the Bulgarian Legion, a half-battalion of dismounted Cossacks, and some artillery – and take possession of the strategically vital passes through the Balkan Mountains before Ottoman troops did the same.

The Russian advance came as a shock to the Ottomans, who scrambled to form a new line south of the Balkan Mountains. However, they simply did not have enough men to properly guard the mountain passes the Russians sought to exploit. One such pass was the Khankoi Pass, itself found to be totally unguarded, as it was little more than a rough path. Russian pioneers set to work improving the path to allow the passage of cavalry and artillery, the work carried out totally undetected by the Ottomans. Nevertheless, it took Gurko three days to get over the pass, his infantrymen hauling the heavy guns up the steep slopes, a feat that led Gurko to later remark, "None but Russian soldiers could have made such a march in the time, and dragged the guns through such a defile."

Once over the Khankoi Pass, Gurko's force advanced through the Tundja Valley. The Russians skirmished with Ottoman advance troops, causing some delay, but otherwise continued without meeting serious resistance. Soon, Gurko's men found themselves looking towards their prize – the Shipka Pass.

Capture of the pass

On 17 July, Prince Nikolay Svyatopolk-Mirsky, commander of the Russian 9th Infantry Division, attacked Ottoman positions at Shipka Pass. Gurko was supposed to work in concert with Mirsky to take the pass but had not arrived on time due to his delay. Unwilling to wait, Mirsky sent forward 2,000 men of the 36th (Orlovski) Infantry Regiment, supported by Cossacks and artillery, but they were repulsed by an Ottoman force of 4,000 made up of regular infantrymen, irregular Bashi-Bazouks and artillery. When Gurko arrived the next day, he also attacked the pass with two infantry battalions supported by two companies of Cossacks. This second attack also failed. Russian Colonel Nikolai Epanchin recalled, "The fire of [Ottoman] musketry and cannon was murderous." Russian casualties stood at 150 killed or wounded.

Nevertheless, the Ottoman defenders believed more Russian troops would soon be arriving and that they would unlikely be able to hold the pass from another assault. On 19 July, Ottoman troops quietly withdrew from the pass. The Russians, who believed the Ottomans were considering their demands for surrender, only realised the defenders had retired when they sent forward pickets to probe Ottoman defences. Shipka Pass now fell to the Russians.

The scene after the taking of the Shipka Pass by Russian troops in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878

© Alamy

Following the capture of the pass, Epanchin encountered signs of the already brutal nature of the war, “Here … could be seen traces of the barbarity of the Turks … On the terrace beside the guardhouse was found the decapitated corpse of Captain Bashtavnuzi, while to the right and left of the road lay the headless corpses of the Cossack infantry and Bulgarians … By the barracks our surgeons were binding up the Turkish wounded, and not far off lay the mutilated bodies of our riflemen, and among them hospital orderlies with the Red Cross on their arms. These bodies presented a terrible sight; half naked and with the fingers cut off, with the knees turned outwards, and the soles with strips of skin cut off.”

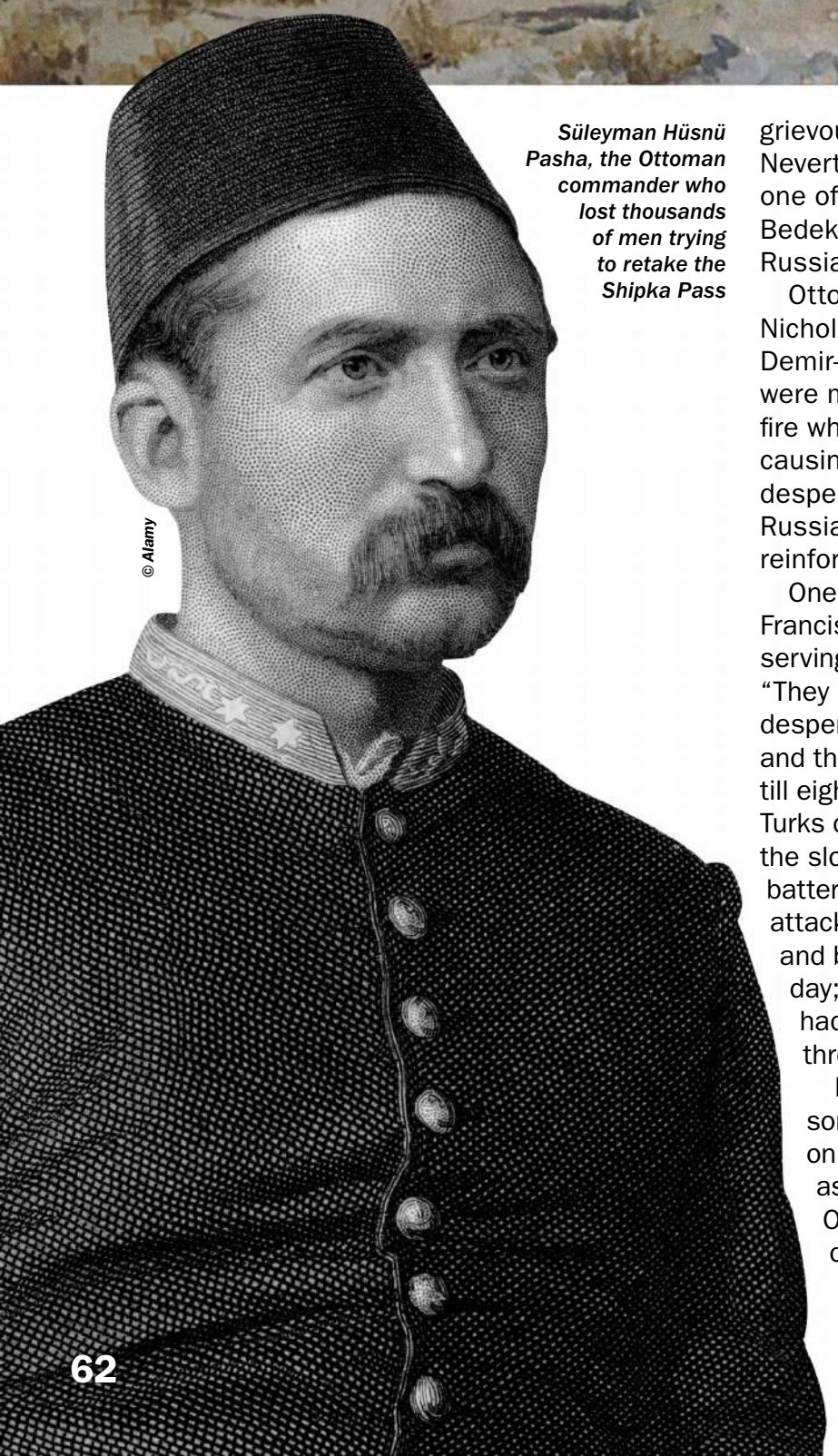
Battle begins

The loss of Shipka Pass had come as another blow to the Ottomans and plans to retake it were quickly put in motion. This task fell to Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha, who had been recalled from Montenegro with an experienced army of 20,000 men. Elsewhere, the advance of the main Russian force had ground to a halt in the face of determined Ottoman resistance at Plevna in northern Bulgaria. The war had suddenly taken on a static nature and not the one of mobility envisioned by the Russians.

Meanwhile, Gurko had garrisoned the Shipka Pass with a Russian infantry regiment and a Bulgarian battalion, while he led the remainder of his force south towards the town of Kazanlak. It would be on the 29 July that some of Gurko’s Bulgarian troops clashed with the advanced guard of Süleyman’s force near Stara Zagora. Süleyman’s veteran soldiers proved too much for the Bulgarians, who withdrew after sustaining heavy casualties. The Ottoman troops then burned Stara Zagora and reputedly murdered thousands of its Christian inhabitants. Gurko, realising he was heavily outnumbered, retired back through the Khankoi Pass but sent five Bulgarian battalions to reinforce the garrison at Shipka Pass.

It was now the turn of the Russians to defend the Shipka Pass, their garrison consisting of the Russian 36th Infantry Regiment, five battalions of the Bulgarian Legion, five companies of Cossacks, and 29 guns. In all around 7,500 men, mostly Bulgarians. The defenders set about improving the old Ottoman defences, digging new trenches and building breastworks out of stone. They also buried explosives left behind by the original Ottoman garrison to blow up Ottoman troops as they advanced on the pass.

His army swelled to 38,000 men, Süleyman ordered an advance on the Shipka Pass on 21 August. The Ottoman troops climbed the rocky slopes leading to Mount St Nicholas where they came under a murderous fire from the muskets and artillery of the Bulgarian defenders above, which inflicted



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Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha, the Ottoman commander who lost thousands of men trying to retake the Shipka Pass

grievous casualties among the Ottomans. Nevertheless, Süleyman had managed to get one of his artillery batteries onto the Maly-Bedek Mountain, from where it fired onto the Russian and Bulgarian troops.

Ottoman troops again assaulted Mount St Nicholas, this time from the direction of the Demir-Tepe Mountain to the east. Again, they were met by withering musket and artillery fire which burned through the Ottoman ranks, causing yet more heavy casualties. As the desperate fight for Shipka Pass raged, the Russian 35th Infantry Regiment arrived to reinforce the defenders.

One witness to events was Lieutenant Francis Greene of the US Army, who was serving as military attaché to the Russians, "They [the Ottomans] attacked with the utmost desperation, but were as desperately received, and the struggle went on from a little afternoon till eight o'clock at night. Again and again the Turks came on yelling 'Allah' and rushed up the slope to within a few yards of the [Russian] battery; but they could go no farther. Their last attack was made by moonlight about 9.00pm, and being repulsed they tried no more for that day; but they remained in the positions they had taken … and kept up a constant fire throughout the night."

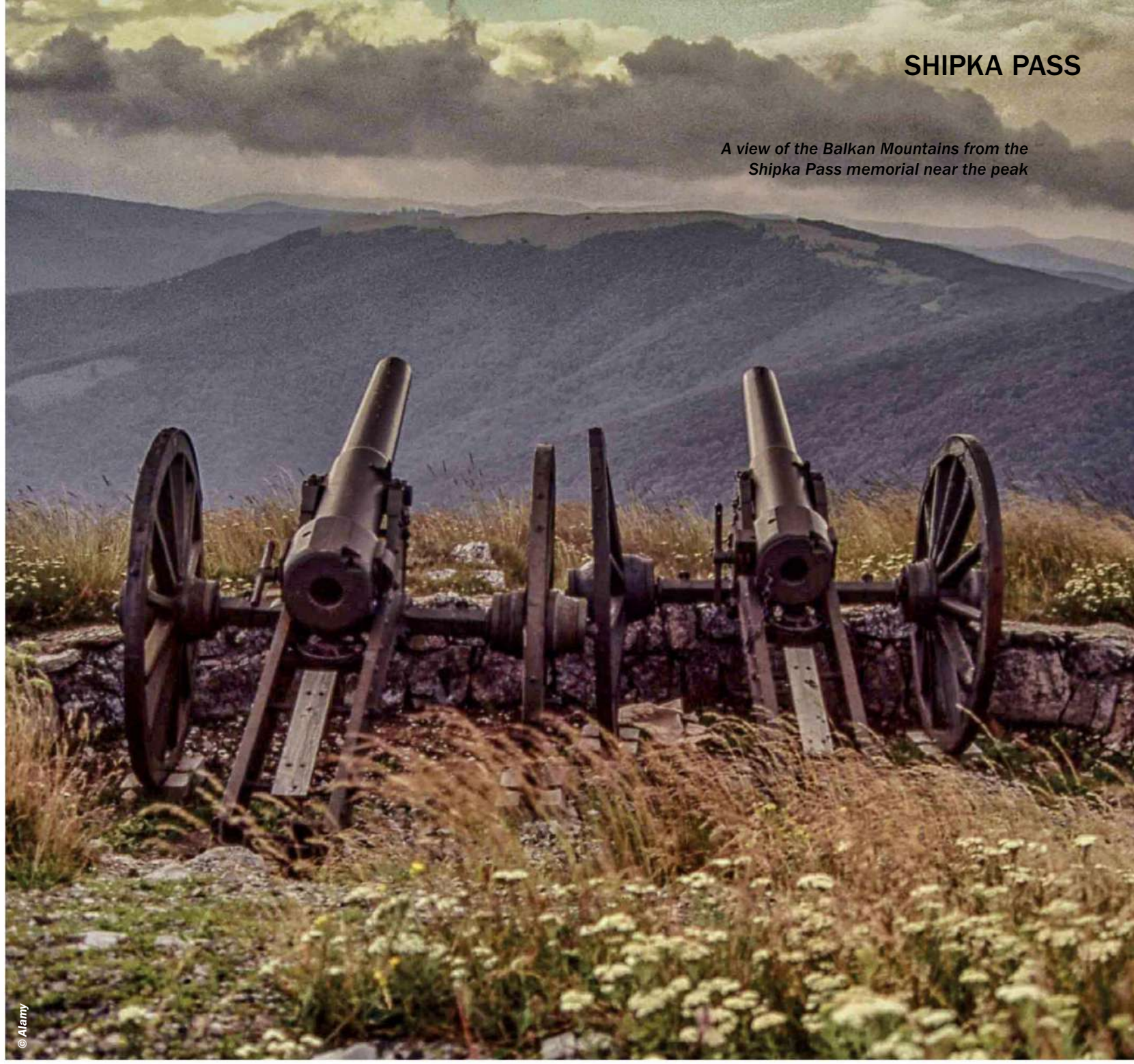
Little happened on 22 August, apart from some infrequent exchange of fire. However, on 23 August, Süleyman ordered a major assault. Attacking from three directions, the Ottomans again climbed the steep slopes only to be met by the same savage fire of the Russian and Bulgarian defenders as before. The Russians also set off the buried explosives, causing death and horrendous injuries among the attackers. Nevertheless, some of the Ottoman troops did reach the Russian trenches and bloody hand-to-hand fighting ensued, during which many Russian gunners were killed. A Russian bayonet charge of the 36th (Orlovski) Infantry Regiment eventually threw the Ottomans back down the slopes.

Again and again the Ottomans attacked, despite the murderous fire they faced each time. At one point, the Russians and Bulgarians ran so low on ammunition that they threw rocks and rolled down boulders upon their attackers. Some accounts even quote the corpses of Ottoman dead being picked up and thrown at the attackers. At 3.00pm, the Ottomans managed to overrun the central battery, forcing the defenders back.

Greene recalled what happened next, "Colonel Lipinsky … went back to the road, expostulated, reasoned, threatened, and drove these men back to the positions on the centre hill. From here they delivered their fire in volleys upon the Turks in their rear, who were just beginning to climb the slope toward the road. Stunned by this sudden reception, the Turks wavered a little; and at this very moment … appeared in sight the first of the reenforcements [sic.] … The attack was so bold and spirited that the Turks fell back through the wood … leaving the Russians in possession of their first line of trenches at the foot of the slope."

The Battle Of Shipka *by artist Alexei Kivshenko*

Source: Wiki / PD-Art



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SHIPKA PASS

A view of the Balkan Mountains from the Shipka Pass memorial near the peak

"SOME ACCOUNTS EVEN QUOTE THE CORPSES OF OTTOMAN DEAD BEING PICKED UP AND THROWN AT THE ATTACKERS"

These reinforcements came in the form of 200 mounted men of the 4th Rifle Brigade, who retook the battery, after which the remainder of the brigade, commanded by Fyodor Radetsky, arrived. The Ottomans attacked yet again, and were yet again repulsed. Radetsky then ordered two of his battalions to capture the Bald Mountain, the Russians climbing the slopes to meet a hail of deadly fire from the Ottomans. During the assault, the leading Russian troops were virtually annihilated, and, after much heavy loss, the remainder retired.

The next day, the Russians again attacked the Bald Mountain, but they were unable to take it, although they did manage to dislodge the Ottomans holding Wooded Hill. On 26 August, the Ottomans counter-attacked to retake Wooded Hill, inflicting such casualties on the Russian 35th Infantry Regiment that Radetsky felt compelled to abandon the position. Fighting for the Shipka Pass now died down, but Süleyman Hüsnü Pasha was still determined to retake it.

Süleyman's second attack

The attacks on Shipka Pass had proved costly for Süleyman, losing in the region of 10,000 killed or wounded. For the next three weeks he reorganised his forces and gathered reinforcements for a renewed assault. During that time, Süleyman received orders from Mehemet Ali Pasha to march his army into northern Bulgaria where the bulk of the fighting of the war was taking place. Süleyman, hellbent on retaking the pass, ignored his superior and continued his preparations for another attack.

On 17 September, Süleyman once again ordered his men to attack Mount St Nicholas. Despite slippery conditions caused by recent rains, the Ottoman troops captured some of the forward Russian trenches, but they remained unable to reach the top. The Russians counter-attacked and drove the Ottomans off. Again, the Ottomans attacked only to be repulsed once more. This cycle continued without success. Süleyman's renewed assault had cost him another 3,000 men. Despite his failure to recapture the Shipka Pass, Süleyman was promoted to command Ottoman forces in northern Bulgaria following the sacking of Mehemet Ali. He departed having not achieved the goal he so desperately wanted.

Ottoman defeat

As winter approached, the defenders on Shipka Pass were withdrawn and replaced by fresh troops. For those now defending the pass, life in the snow proved miserable. Many became sick. However, there was good news for the freezing defenders when they learned that the Ottoman fortress at Plevna had finally surrendered in December. The end of the war was in sight.

Gurko now went on the offensive, leading an army of over 65,000 through the Araba Konak Pass, capturing Sofia on 4 January 1878. Moving on, he marched south through the Balkan Mountains. He relieved Radetsky at Shipka after which both generals worked in concert to trap an Ottoman army under Veissel Pasha near Sheynovo on 5 January. Veissel, greatly outnumbered, was forced to surrender on 9 January. Some 30,000 Ottoman troops were taken prisoner.

The Russo-Bulgarian defence of Shipka Pass had been an epic one and casualties were high. The Russians suffered around 13,500 killed and wounded while the Ottomans sustained something in the region of 60,000 killed, wounded or taken prisoner. The defence had also tied up thousands of Ottoman troops that might otherwise had marched to the aid of their comrades at Plevna. Had the defence of Shipka Pass failed, the outcome of the war may well have been different.

FURTHER READING

- Barry, Quintin, *War in the East: A Military History Of The Russo-Turkish War 1877-78*, Solihull, Helion & Company, 2012.
- Dury, Ian, *The Russo-Turkish War 1877*, Oxford, Osprey, 1994

MiG-15

The Soviet Union's classic 2nd generation jet fighter, code-named 'Fagot'

WORDS **STUART HADAWAY**

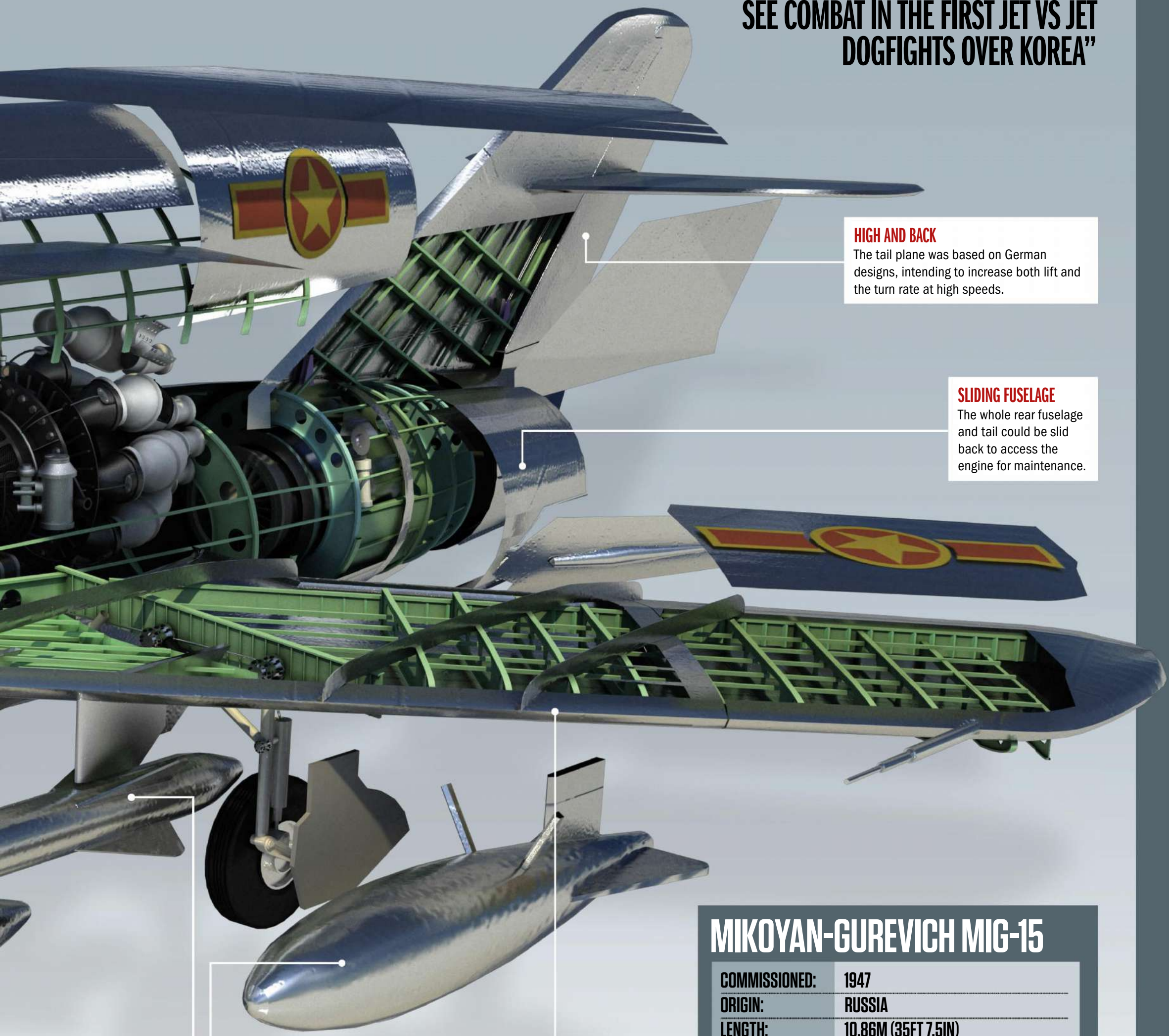
The MiG-15 (NATO codename 'Fagot') was the Soviet Union's first successful second generation jet fighter – one that truly took account of the aerodynamics of jet propulsion. It would serve in dozens of militaries around the world, and become the most prolific jet fighter ever built with over 17,000 made by the Russians or under licence elsewhere.

Although designed to intercept Western bombers, the MiG-15 would most famously see combat in the first jet vs jet dogfights over Korea. Although it fared well against US Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers, the design proved marginally inferior to the North American F-86 Sabre fighter. Its interception role led to design choices that optimised it for high altitude attacks against large, slow enemies, and left it at a disadvantage in fast-moving dogfights. Even so, the type was a success, especially when using ambush tactics, and would later see combat over the straits of Taiwan and with the Egyptian Air Force during the Suez Crisis in 1956. Even after it was obsolete in a combat role it proved a solid and reliable basic jet trainer, although Yuri Gagarin, the first man into space, was killed in a MiG-15 accident in 1968.

1930S TECHNOLOGY

The MiG-15's gunsight was a copy of the RAF's Mk. 2D (.303) gyroscopic gunsight, copied from Hawker Hurricanes given to Russia in 1941.

"THE MIG-15 WOULD MOST FAMOUSLY SEE COMBAT IN THE FIRST JET VS JET DOGFIGHTS OVER KOREA"



HIGH AND BACK
The tail plane was based on German designs, intending to increase both lift and the turn rate at high speeds.

SLIDING FUSELAGE
The whole rear fuselage and tail could be slid back to access the engine for maintenance.

BOMBS OR FUEL
The MiG-15 could be fitted with drop tanks for extended range (jettisoned in combat), two 100kg bombs, or unguided rockets.

REDIRECTING AIRFLOW
The chords stopped air being pushed away from the aircraft, helping generate lift.

Illustration: Alex Pang

MIKOYAN-GUREVICH MIG-15

COMMISSIONED:	1947
ORIGIN:	RUSSIA
LENGTH:	10.86M (35FT 7.5IN)
RANGE:	1330KM (WITHOUT DROP TANKS)
ENGINE:	KLIMOV VK-1 CENTRIFUGAL-FLOW TURBOJET 2,700KG (5,950LB) THRUST
CREW:	1
WINGSPAN:	10.86M (35FT 7.5IN)
PRIMARY WEAPON:	1 X N-37 37MM CANNON AND 2 X NS-23 23MM CANNONS

Source: Wiki / Alf van Beem

Hardpoints under each wing can carry an external payload

"MEANT TO BRING DOWN BIG, LUMBERING TARGETS, ITS GUNS WERE LARGE CALIBRE AND SLOW-FIRING WITH LOW MUZZLE-VELOCITIES"

ARMAMENT

Designed as a high-altitude interceptor, the MiG-15's intended targets were Western nuclear bombers. Meant to bring down big, lumbering targets, its guns were large calibre and slow-firing with low muzzle-velocities. Equipped with one N-37 37mm cannon with 40 rounds and two NS-23 (later NR-23) 23mm cannons with 80 rounds each, this left them unsuited to the type of fast-moving dogfights they met over Korea. Aiming was made harder as the cannon types had differing ballistic characteristics, so one cannon type might hit the target while the other went high or low.

The cannon sits under the nose, around the undercarriage

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The Klimov VK-1, an improved copy of the Rolls Royce Nene

Source: Wiki / Alf van Beem

ENGINE

The Soviets struggled with effective jet engine designs after the Second World War, with even captured German designs and designers proving inadequate. Miraculously, they managed to buy some Rolls Royce Nenes from Britain, and put them into production as the Klimov RD-45, rated at 2,270kg/5,005lb thrust. This enabled the MiG-15 to become reality, and an improved version of the Nene/RD-45, the Klimov VK-1, soon followed afterwards. These engines gave the MiG-15 the high rate of acceleration and superb rate of climb that made it such an effective interceptor.

Source: Wiki / Ad Meskens

The distinctive split-air intake of the MiG-15

DESIGN

The design of the MiG-15 was based on German research into jet aerodynamics. The swept back wing improved high-speed flight characteristics, although it also led to air flow being deflected outwards, decreasing lift. This was solved by adding two full-chord boundary-layer fences on each wing. The air intake, in the nose, split so the air ran either side of the low-set cockpit before entering the engine. The engine itself filled the rear fuselage, where any hit could cause serious damage.

The MiG-15 has two speed brakes, one either side of the rear fuselage

© Alamy

The MiG-15's cockpit was poorly laid out

Source: Wiki / USAF

COCKPIT

The MiG-15's cockpit sat low in the fuselage to reduce drag, leaving the pilot with a very poor field of view below him in front, and almost no field of view behind. These problems were made worse by the lack of headroom – the canopy gave very little space for the pilot to move their head. The ergonomics of the layout were also poor, with some key switches on the right hand side, so the pilot had to let go of the control column to select them.

Source: Wiki / MKFI

Source: Wiki / Aleksandr Markin

A MiG-15 with a F-86 Sabre – the classic dogfight pair from the Korean War

Source: Wiki / Tim Felce Airwolfhound

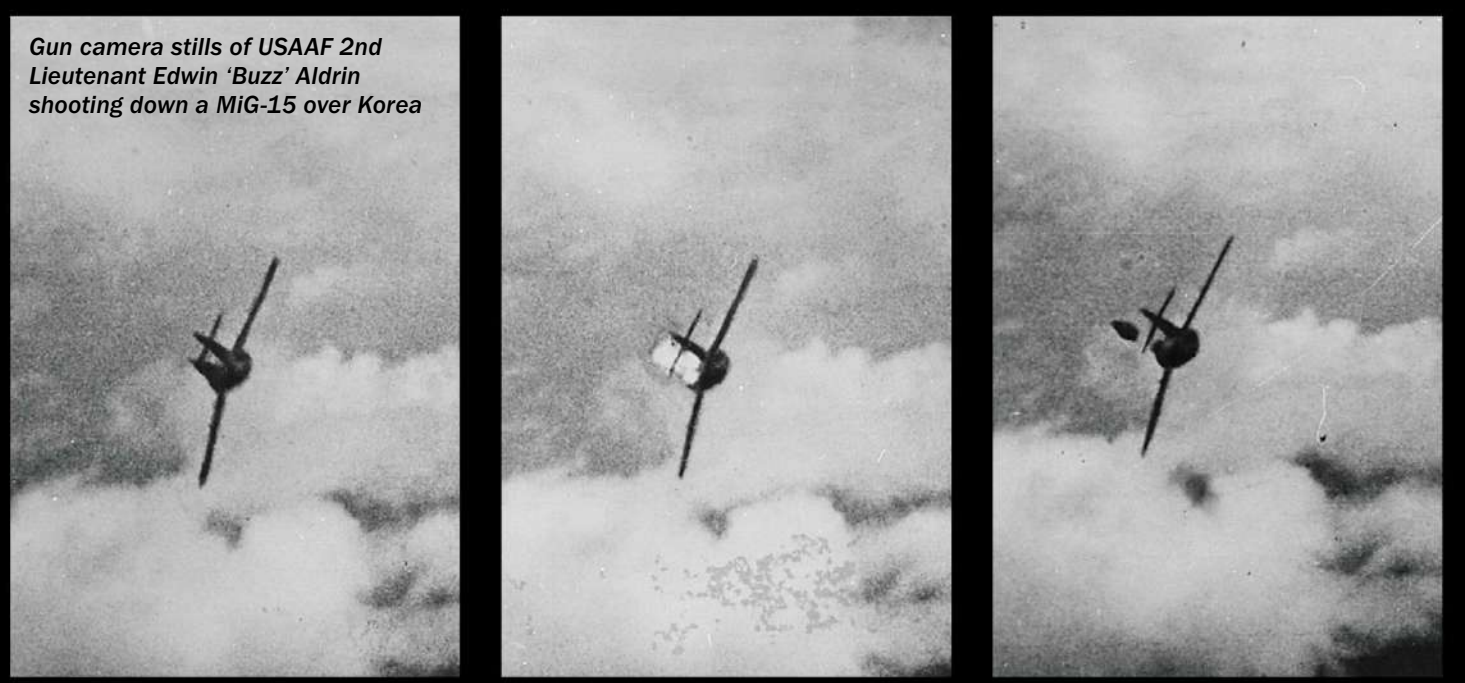
SERVICE HISTORY

The MiG-15 entered Soviet service in 1949. The desperate need for effective fighters during the Korean War saw the type rapidly introduced into the Chinese and North Korean air forces, although the Russians covertly provided the bulk of pilots over Korea for some time.

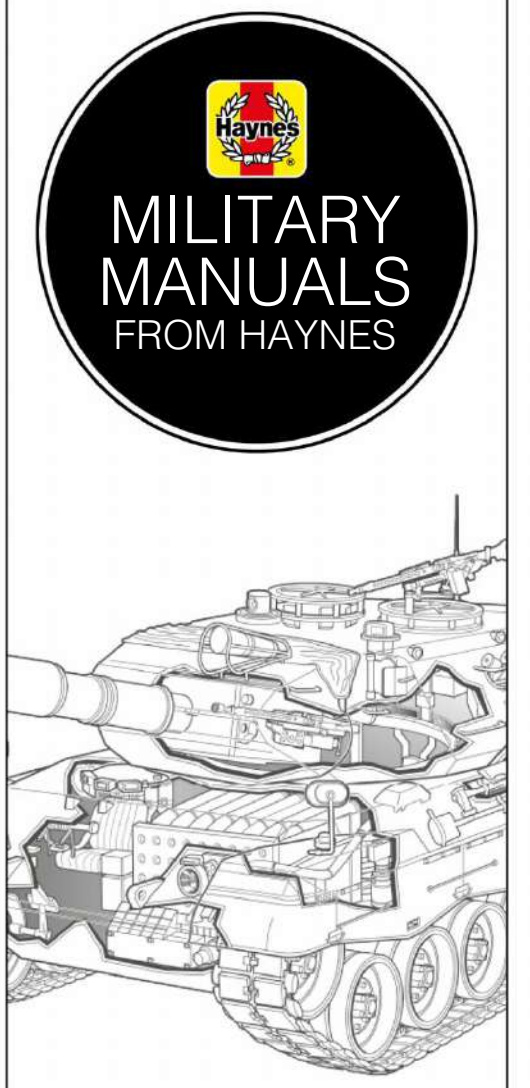
The MiG generally fared badly against the US F-86 Sabre, partly due to the relatively poor training of the non-Russian pilots, but also because of the MiG's design. It was an interceptor, not a fighter, and at below 30,000ft its dogfighting abilities were simply not as good.

The type was used by nearly 40 other Soviet or Soviet-friendly nations, and was built under licence in China, Czechoslovakia and Poland. A range of variants were built with modified armament and engines or as two-seat trainers. Although replaced by the improved MiG-17 in the early 1950s, the type remained an effective bomber interceptor and trainer, and is still used by North Korea.

Gun camera stills of USAAF 2nd Lieutenant Edwin 'Buzz' Aldrin shooting down a MiG-15 over Korea



Source: Wiki / US National Archives and Records Administration



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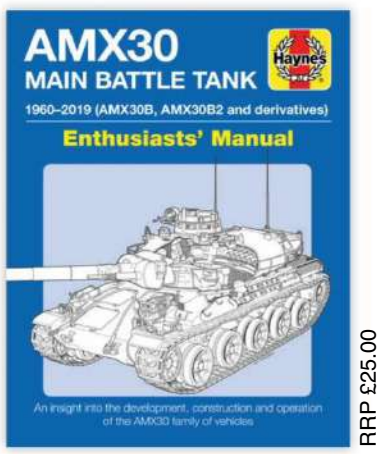

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US Army artillery crew fires a 105mm howitzer against North Korean Communist positions during a battle in the Republic of Korea

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"NO GOOD SOLDIER WANTS TO GO TO WAR, BUT THAT'S WHAT HE'S TRAINED FOR. WHEN I WAS IN THE ARMY, AND FELLOW SOLDIERS WERE ENGAGED IN WAR, I WANTED TO BE THERE"

Colonel Ola L. Mize

Heroes of the Medal of Honor

OLA L. MIZE

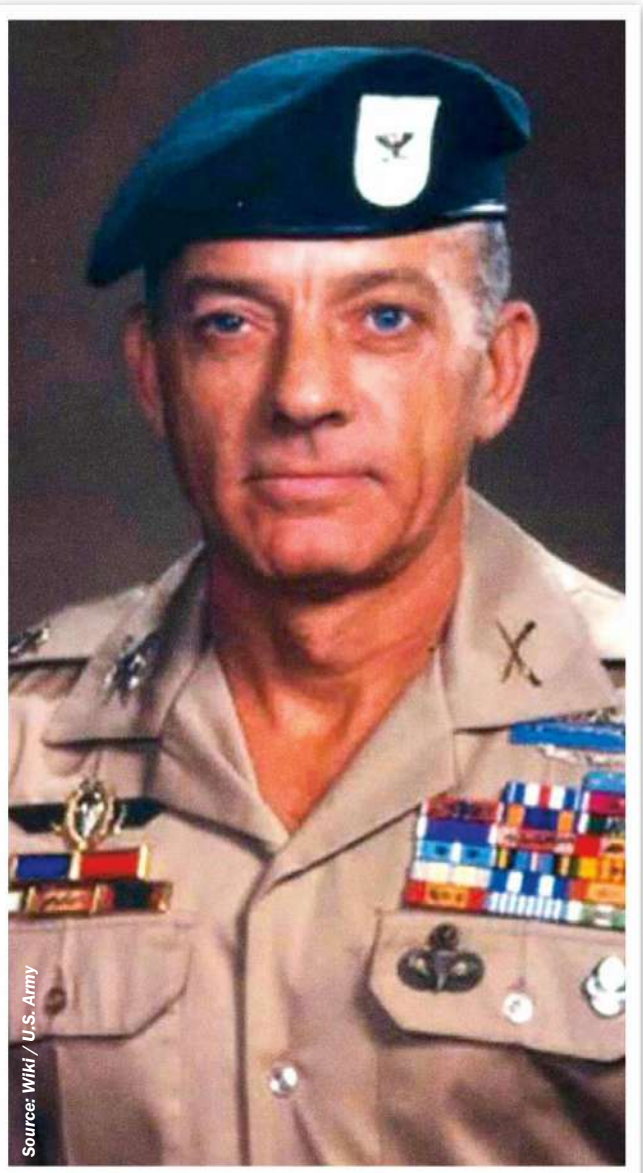
Leading the determined defence of a hilltop position in South Korea on 10 June 1953, Sergeant Mize displayed tremendous heroism, rescuing wounded comrades and killing dozens of enemy soldiers

WORDS **MICHAEL E. HASKEW**

When the smoke cleared and the rattle of automatic weapons fire finally faded, 21-year-old Sergeant Ola Lee Mize and a handful of American infantrymen were left standing. Hours of brutal combat against the 22nd and 221st Regiments of the Chinese 74th Division were over, and scores of enemy bodies lay sprawled across the hillside known as Outpost Harry. Repeated enemy onslaughts had come to nothing, but the defenders had also paid a heavy price. Only 12 of the original 56 Americans manning the position had survived. Near the end of the Korean War, United Nations forces were contesting a Chinese offensive in mid-June 1953. American troops defending a 13,000-yard stretch of the front line near Surang-ni, South Korea, would eventually lose 174 killed and 824 wounded.

No ground was more bitterly contested than Outpost Harry, which was located in the 'Iron Triangle' about 60 miles northeast of the South Korean capital of Seoul and on the most direct route to the city.

When Mize made his way to a command post the morning after the fighting of 10-11 June had ended, officers asked who he was. The dirt and grime of combat obscured his face. He was wounded. His uniform was tattered, and some observers remembered that the vest he wore was actually smoking. When the young soldier responded, "Sergeant Mize," an officer chirped, "You're not Mize. He's dead."


Source: Wiki / U.S. Army

Sergeant Ola L. Mize earned the Medal of Honor at Outpost Harry during the Korean War on 10 June 1953

Mize had survived an incredible ordeal and became an unlikely hero, ultimately receiving the Medal of Honor. The son of an Alabama sharecropper, he was practically blind in one eye due to a childhood accident and weighed only 120 pounds. Nevertheless, he would not accept the army's initial rejection. He gained weight and practiced with spoons to pass the required vision test, deftly manipulating the paddle that supposedly covered one eye and then the other to pull off the illusion that he was switching eyes.

With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, Mize was concluding service with the 82nd Airborne Division. Rather than attending college, he decided to re-enlist and requested a combat opportunity. It came on that hot June night, when Mize was a sergeant with Company K, 15th Infantry Regiment, Third Division.

Outpost Harry was located closer to the enemy, just 320 yards from Chinese lines, than the main United Nations perimeter, 425 yards away. One of three such outposts, the other two named Tom and Dick, Harry rose 1,280 feet. Holding the high ground was essential because it shielded a portion of the main United Nations line and the adjacent Kumwha Valley from Chinese observation and artillery fire.

The defence of Outpost Harry rotated with four US infantry companies and one Greek company occupying the position in turn. For more than a week, the hill was under intermittent artillery and mortar barrages, a total of more than 88,000 shells falling on the defenders. On the morning of 10 June,

Sergeant Ola L. Mize, left, after receiving the Medal of Honor from President Eisenhower. His future wife, Betty, stands beside him

© Getty

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Captain Martin A. Markley of the 15th Regiment relayed orders to his command that an attack was imminent. He later commented, “All total there was a reinforced PVA [People’s Volunteer Army] regiment of approximately 3,600 enemy trying to kill us.” The Chinese attackers outnumbered Company K 30-to-1.

As night fell, Mize knew they were coming. He had seen a steady stream of Chinese trucks behind a distant ridgeline, but requests for artillery and airstrikes were denied as he was told the enemy was simply resupplying troops already in place. “Well,” he said. “If that’s what they’re doing they must have the whole Chinese Army in front of me because they have been moving trucks up at night with their lights on for the last five days.”

After receiving a call from a weapons squad leader, Mize moved up to a forward position to take a closer look. “Something was wrong near his position, and he couldn’t figure out what it was,” Mize recalled. “I climbed up and looked out over our trenchline, and there were bushes all over the place, within ten yards of our trenches. I said ‘Where the hell did all those bushes come from?’. About that time a few of them moved. I just automatically started spraying the hell out of those bushes.

“M/SGT. MIZE’S CONDUCT AND UNFLINCHING COURAGE REFLECT LASTING GLORY UPON HIMSELF AND UPHOLD THE NOBLE TRADITIONS OF THE MILITARY SERVICE”

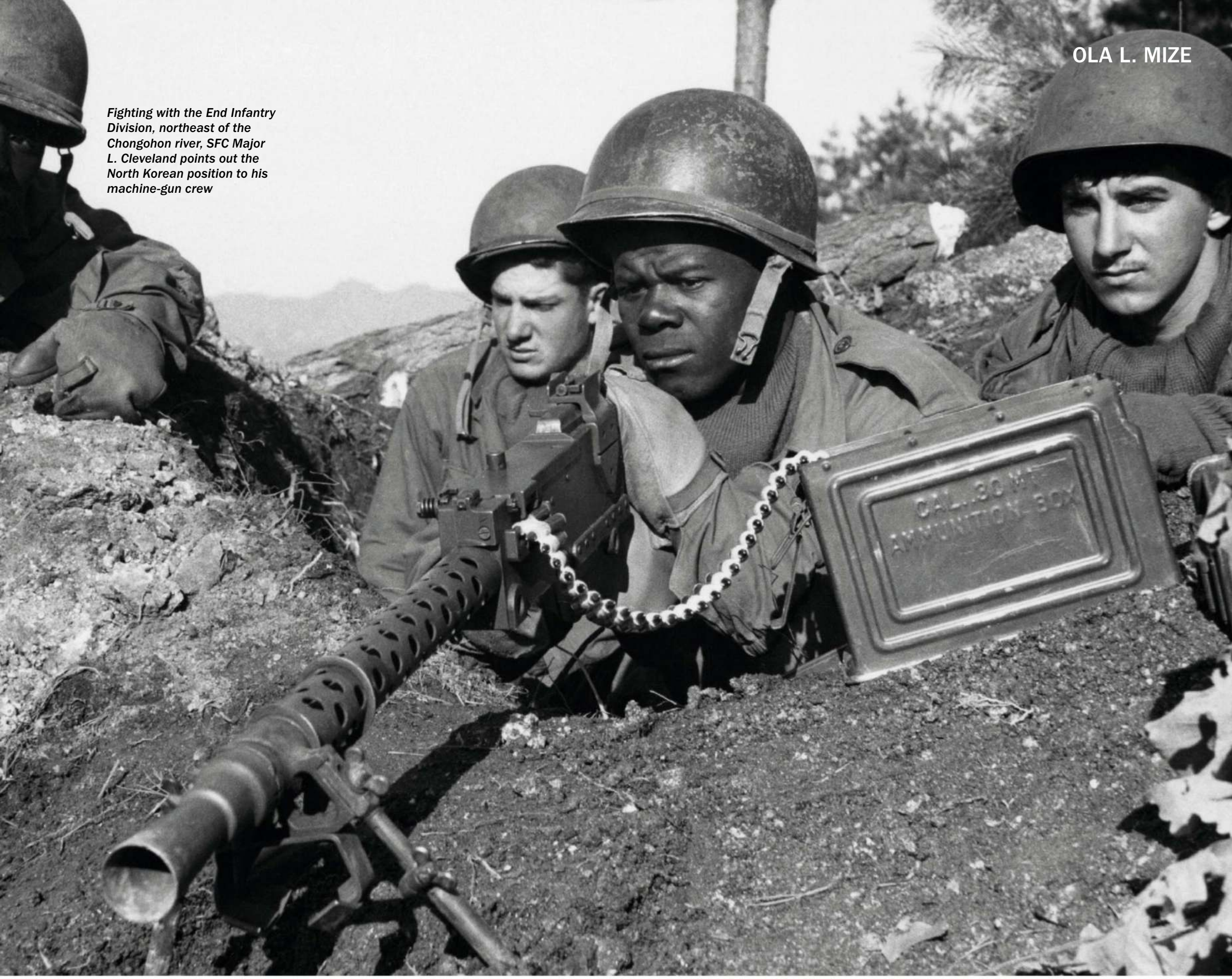
Medal of Honor Citation

“There were bodies falling all over the place, and about that time they kicked off the artillery, and I thought the end of the world had come.” Mize had killed an estimated ten enemy infiltrators who had crept close, but the agony of Company K was just beginning.

An all-out, battalion-sized infantry assault followed the artillery barrage. “For the next two hours,” Mize remembered, “all I was doing was shooting Chinese as fast as they came over that trench line and filling the trench up with them.” He came across one of his men armed with a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle), swinging the weapon like a club at six Chinese soldiers. Mize shot all six of them.

When he heard that a soldier manning a listening post had been wounded, Mize set out with a corpsman to rescue the man and returned safely. He proceeded to organise a defensive system that disrupted the Chinese attack. Despite the fact that all Company K officers were dead or wounded, Mize and a few other soldiers maintained steady fire and hurled grenades at the enemy. They moved from bunker to bunker to give the impression that the Chinese were confronting a much larger defending force.

The concussion of enemy mortar rounds and exploding hand grenades knocked Mize off his feet three times, but he regained his composure and relentlessly fought the enemy, which regrouped and charged Outpost Harry repeatedly. When a Chinese soldier stepped behind an American and prepared to fire, Mize



Fighting with the End Infantry Division, northeast of the Chongohon river, SFC Major L. Cleveland points out the North Korean position to his machine-gun crew

shot him dead with a single bullet and then continued to encourage the men around him while distributing precious ammunition.

The Chinese wave overran several American positions. Mize remembered seeing a comrade's throat cut and later described his response as going "battle crazy". As enemy soldiers leaped into an American machine-gun position, Mize hurried to the scene and killed ten of them, putting the rest to flight. When he returned to his original position, his men were amazed that he was still alive.

A story of the sergeant's combat prowess later circulated, asserting that he had dispatched the last of the Chinese soldiers in the machine-gun position with an entrenching tool after emptying the magazine of his M-1 carbine. Accordingly, a bronzed entrenching tool was hung proudly on the wall behind his desk in later years. Hand-to-hand combat was indeed common during those desperate hours.

Mize provided cover for several wounded men who could not immediately be evacuated. He found a radio and directed artillery fire on the attackers milling around the base of the hill. As the sun began to rise, he quickly pitched in to organise a counter-attack that finally drove the enemy back.

By the time the fighting of 10-11 June had ended, Company K had been reinforced by Companies C and E, 15th Infantry, and a platoon of tanks. Battered but unbroken, Mize's men were soon relieved. For seven more days, the Chinese hammered away at Outpost Harry. Their fury spent unsuccessfully, they withdrew after sustaining an estimated 5,250 killed and wounded. United Nations losses amounted to 655 dead and wounded and 44 missing in action.

Sergeant Ola Mize is believed to have singlehandedly accounted for 65 of the Chinese killed in defence of Outpost Harry. "I thought I'd bought the farm," he said in a postwar interview. "I just knew I was going to die. I knew it. I accepted it. All I wanted to do was take as many of them with me as I could."

Sergeant Mize completed his tour of duty in Korea and was recommended for the Medal of Honor soon after the drama at Outpost Harry. Initially, he refused his country's highest honour for bravery in combat, stating that those who really deserved it were the men who died defending the desolate hill.

Promoted to master sergeant, Mize did accept the Medal of Honor from President Dwight D. Eisenhower on 7 September 1954. "I was scared to death, a country boy from northeast Alabama meeting the President of the United States," he recalled. "He stood there and talked to me and put the medal around my neck. He saw I was nervous and said, 'I would be too if I was as young as you are looking at an old crow like me.'"

Mize remained in the US Army, and along with 27 other Special Forces soldiers splashed ashore on a Normandy beach as an extra in the motion picture *The Longest Day*. He completed the Special Forces Officers Course and subsequently three tours of duty during the Vietnam War. He led several Special Forces advanced training programmes and developed the Combat Divers Qualification Course. Leading Detachment B-36 of 3rd Mobile Strike Force Command in 1969, he was awarded the Silver Star for valour.

After 31 years of service, Mize retired with the rank of colonel in 1981. He died of cancer on 5 March 2014 at the age of 82.

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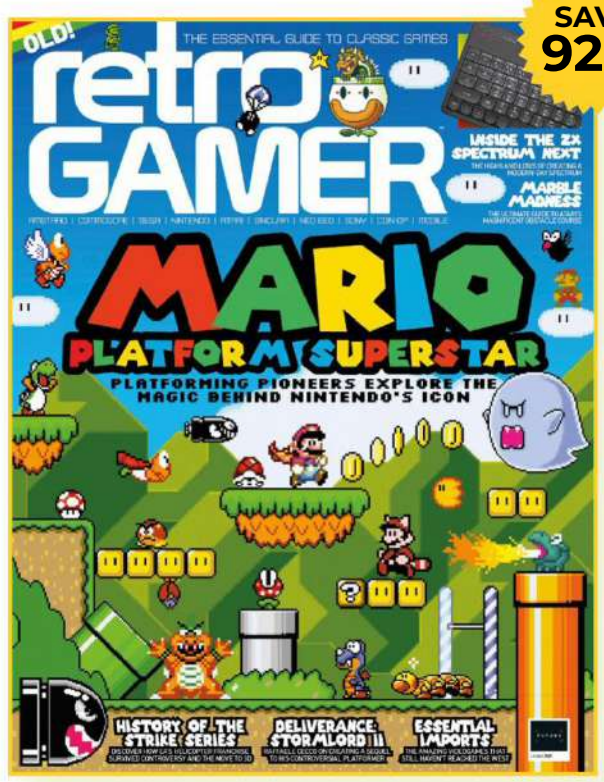

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MUSEUMS & EVENTS

Guernsey celebrates 75 since its liberation during WWII, plus how you can explore fantastic digital collections online

Alderney has a large number of fortifications mostly dating from the Victorian era and WWII

FREEDOM FROM OCCUPATION

In 2020, Guernsey and its surrounding islands mark 75 years since their liberation from German forces

The Channel Islands were the only part of the British Isles to be occupied by German forces during WWII, with the balliwicks (districts) of Guernsey and Jersey being occupied from 30 June 1940 until their liberation on 9 May 1945. Guernsey's occupation also included a German presence on its sister islands of Alderney, Sark, Herm and Lihou, and a quarter of the population was evacuated to the UK. The Germans built extensive fortifications and the islands were cut off from the world for years. Since 1945, Guernsey has celebrated 'Liberation Day' with commemorations, parades and parties.

In 2020, visitors to Guernsey and its smaller islands will be taking part in 75 unique heritage-themed celebrations to commemorate 75 years since their liberation. From exclusive tours, guided walks and exhibitions to outdoor and family events, the rolling programme of 'Heritage75' will enable visitors to discover and experience what life was like before, during and after the occupation.

Exciting events are also taking place at hotspots across the islands, including many historical sites. This includes a ramble through St Andrew's parish on Guernsey that ends with a guided tour of the extraordinary German Underground Hospital, which is the largest structure of its kind in the Channel Islands. There is also a cycling tour that follows the exact route of the railway which was constructed during Guernsey's occupation.

The island's German Occupation Museum will be showcasing a series of events and talks as well as a new 'Unseen History' exhibition from 1 April. Updated for Heritage75, it will feature some 'never before seen' pictures, an exclusive colour film from the day Guernsey was liberated in 1945, plus a 'Liberation Tearoom', tableaux and models.

Beyond the shores of Guernsey, visitors to nearby Alderney can experience a 'Fortress Fortnight' between 17 July-2 August 2020. On select summer nights, live music will be performed around Alderney at 'pop-up' bars at four of the most prominent forts on the island. Tourists can usually only view these private forts from the outside, but this is an

Historical re-enactors dress up in WWII uniforms and drive a Jeep for Liberation Day, 2019

A fireworks display to celebrate Liberation Day

Holidaymakers sit on German bunkers on the cliffs at Pleimont

© Visit Guernsey

opportunity for all visitors to take a closer look inside, all while concerts play out.

In addition to all this, Heritage75 will be beginning its events with a package for 25-28 May 2020 from the Old Government House Hotel & Spa at St Peter Port, Guernsey.

Due to the outbreak of Covid-19, Heritage75 has decided to postpone events running as part of the festival up until the end of April 2020. As the festival was due to run until October 2020, several events may be postponed until later in the year, depending on UK Government advice and action to protect public health.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE ABOVE EVENTS VISIT: WWW.VISITGUERNSEY.COM/SEE-AND-DO/EVENTS-FESTIVALS/HERITAGE75

5 FANTASTIC

ONLINE COLLECTIONS

Browse through online objects from military museums with an impressive range from land, sea and air

In the wake of the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic, digital online collections are a fantastic way to explore museums from the comfort of your own home. The internet has provided a marvellous way to access history and the fascinating objects that renowned museums hold. Here are five examples of exceptional and accessible military collections in both Britain and the United States.

NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

The leading authority on the British Army has catalogued and computerised its world-class collection that covers land-based military history from the British Civil Wars to the present day. The online collections have a handy 'theme' browser that connects you to highlights including Florence Nightingale's lamp, Lawrence of Arabia's robes, Oliver Cromwell's banner and artefacts from the Charge of the Light Brigade.

***Right:** A very rare Parliamentarian flag from the British Civil Wars c.1642-46*
***Middle:** Lawrence 'of Arabia's' robes*
***Far right:** Florence Nightingale's lamp*

All images: National Army Museum

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.COLLECTION.NAM.AC.UK

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

Situated on the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, this museum houses a wide array of weapons and aircraft including the presidential planes of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon. There are also free virtual tours of its entire grounds that enable you to see objects and decommissioned aircraft from WWII, Korea and Vietnam.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.NATIONALMUSEUM.AF.MIL

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Britain's leading military museum has a huge collection of approximately 800,000 items from conflicts of the 20th and 21st centuries. This staggering amount has been collected since 1917 but is neatly collated into very accessible genres online. This includes an exceptional art collection, 155,000 three-dimensional objects, and hours of film, 11 million photographs and thousands of sound recordings relating to conflict since 1914.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.IWM.ORG.UK/COLLECTIONS

NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

Part of Royal Museums, Greenwich, the National Maritime Museum is a fantastic resource for Britain's seafaring history. Its online collection has rotating monthly highlights on one page from its curators and browsers including an 'Editorial Choice' and 'Top 5 objects this month'. The highlights for March 2020 had a Horatio Nelson theme including his Trafalgar coat, a model of scaffolding for Nelson's Column and HMS Victory in a giant glass bottle.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.COLLECTIONS.RMG.CO.UK

ROYAL AIR FORCE MUSEUM

Dedicated to the history of the RAF, the museum's online collection comprises of several hundred thousand objects ranging in size from aircraft and vehicles to clothing. Spanning more than a century of aviation history, each exhibit can be easily found online in high-resolution images through filters such as specific collections, time period and either of the museum's branches in London or Cosford, Shropshire.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: WWW.RAFMUSEUM.ORG.UK

REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books and films

THE OCCUPATION

A SURPRISINGLY HONEST, COMPELLING AND WELL ACTED WWII SURVIVOR'S TALE

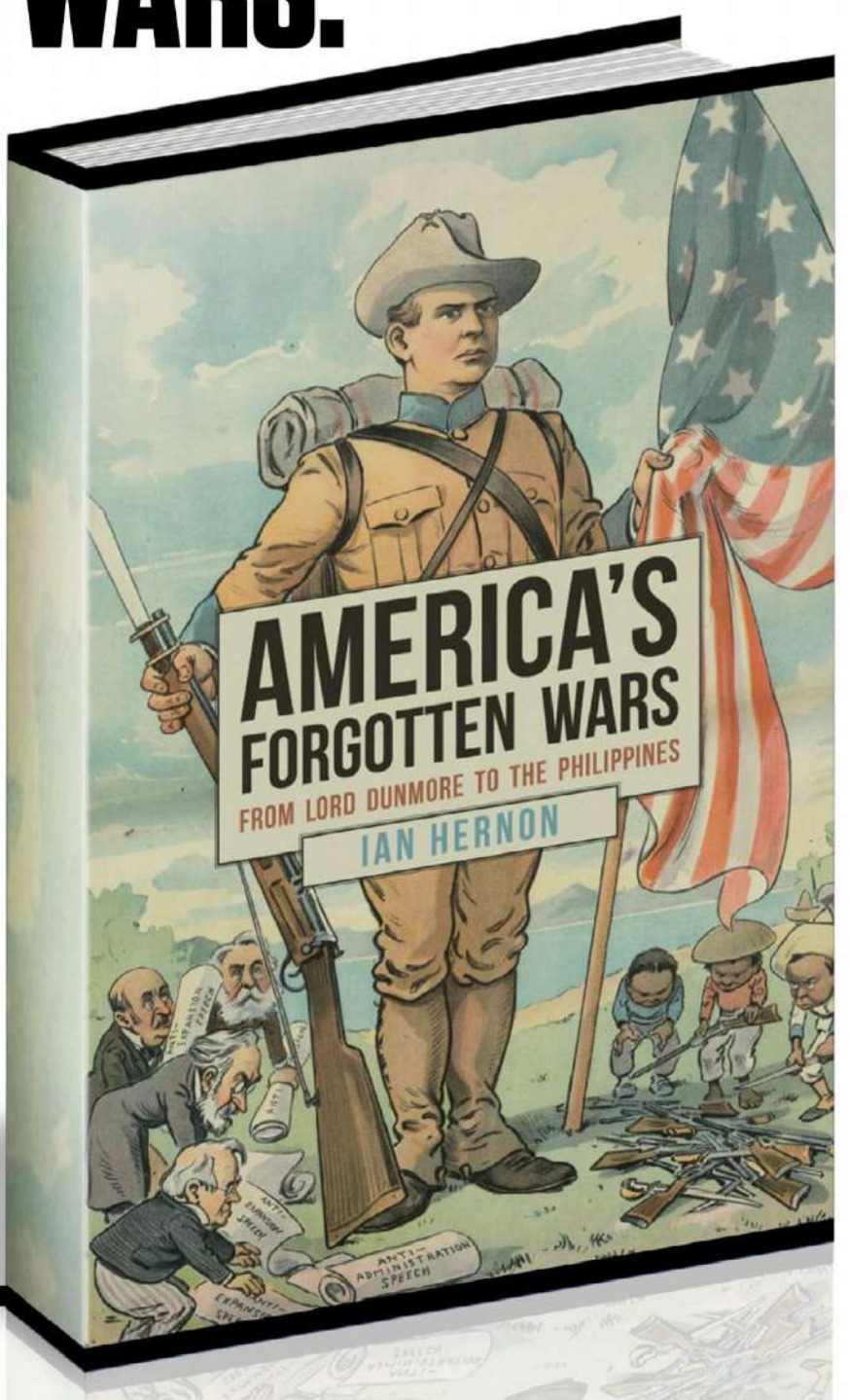
Director: Steven Oritt **Starring:** Zuzanna Surowy, Michalina Olszanska, Eryk Lubos
Distributor: Lightbulb Film Distribution **Released:** 30 March

The Occupation (2019) is based on the story of Holocaust survivor, Sara Goralnik (1930-2018). In 1942, having escaped from the small Jewish ghetto in Korets, Polish youngster Sara (Zuzanna Surowy) and her brother, Moishe (Conrad Cichon), are cut adrift in the countryside, Nazis on their tail. When the children are forced to go their separate ways, Sara finds herself all alone in a nightmarish world. Passing herself off as a Christian girl, she meets a farmer who puts her in contact with his younger brother. The man warily agrees to take on Sara as a maid and nanny. She spends the war in servitude, living in constant fear of her grumpy employer, marauding SS units and bullying partisans.

Steven Orrit's directorial debut, made in association with the USC Shoah Foundation, founded by Steven Spielberg in 1994, punches well above its weight. This is in large part due to excellent work by the cast and a nuanced screenplay by David Himmelstein. The script's handling of interpersonal dramas and dilemmas is impressive and brings much to the table. What we get as viewers is an intriguing and honest depiction of conflicting impulses in people and is best demonstrated in Pavlo (Lubos) and Nadya (Olszanska), the farmer and his wife. They are both anti-Semitic, but in a broad, cultural, casual sense, springing more from being uneducated peasants, than any particular affinity to Nazi ideology. It's no spoiler to say from the first scene they share with Sara, the girl's identity as a Christian isn't truly believed. What then is occurring within them, what inner voice compels them to help? It appears the pair have a semblance moral conscience, even though they take full advantage of the situation and Sara, who is made to sleep in the barn, is offered no money for her toil, only food and shelter. It is made clear, in a later scene, Pavlo and Nadya are dicing with death, when they pass on their way to market three peasants lynched by the SS, a sign hangs from the tree warning "This is what happens to people who hide Jews". A priest, too, sees through the ruse straight away, but acts benevolently, almost admiring Sara's chutzpah. In *The Occupation*, much to its credit, there is no wishy-washy humanist message, big emotional scenes nor third-act spiritual awakening for any characters, only acknowledgement of how acts of humanity come with caveats.

Also making their debut is Surowy. The actor was picked during an open casting call and had no prior experience before the camera. You would never have guessed as she makes a mighty impact in the lead, beautifully capturing Sara's tremendous reserves of stoicism in the face of war's horrors, but also acute vulnerability. Ably backed by seasoned thespians, Lubos and Olszanska, the latter world cinema fans may recognise from films such as *The Lure* (2015) and *I, Olga* (2016), *The Occupation* might have come a cropper with the decision to have Polish actors speaking in English, but the truth is they ace it. **MC**

AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN WARS: FROM LORD DUNMORE TO THE PHILIPPINES



A SOLID, HIGHLY DETAILED RECOUNTING OF LOST HISTORIES

Writer: Ian Hernon **Publisher:** Amberley Publishing **Price:** £20

Ian Hernon has already visited the subject of overlooked conflicts, in his well-received *Britain's Forgotten Wars*. It is an enticing theme, and the chapter titles in this volume promise an enlightening and entertaining read.

Many of the wars covered are blessed with delightfully eccentric names – Little Turtle's War, the Whiskey Rebellion and the Pork and Beans War standing out – but not all have an equal claim to having been forgotten. The Spanish-American War of 1898 doesn't really seem to fit at all in that regard.

Hernon's research is thorough, he has a wealth of detail at his fingertips, and he is able to skilfully weave in eye-witness testimony to lift the narrative and add authenticity. His accounting of these conflicts betrays no bias, each side of the argument is presented fairly and without any obvious agenda. As is often the case with such small-scale, messy conflicts, however, the actual fighting can make up a tiny percentage of the story, so those looking for rollicking battle narratives may be disappointed.

Hernon's writing can sometimes feel a little stiff and it sometimes appears he actually has too much information to impart. There is also a tendency to concentrate too much background to the origins and aftermath of each war (especially true of the first chapter, dealing with Lord Dunmore's War of 1774).

Nevertheless, this is an enjoyable book, which fills in some of the gaps between America's more famous conflicts very nicely indeed, and the whole thing is enlivened by a dramatic selection of images. **DS**

VINTAGE ROGER: LETTERS FROM THE POW YEARS

A GLIMPSE INSIDE THE QUIRKY MIND OF A CAPTURED BRITISH OFFICER

Writer: Charlie Mortimer **Publisher:** Constable **Price:** £16.99

Roger Mortimer's life in the Coldstream Guards was a comfortable and predictable one, until he was taken prisoner while serving with the British Expeditionary Force in 1940. Spending the rest of the war as a POW would tax his easygoing nature and wry sense of humour, but this collection of letters, edited by his son, Charles, reveals an extraordinarily strong character.

Life as a POW could be stultifyingly dull, and letters received from home, along with whatever people chose to send out, were lifelines in a very literal sense. For this reason, he treasured the letters received from his friend Peggy Dunne, who wrote regularly and entertainingly to whatever camp Mortimer was being held in. She also sent books, which he was delighted to discuss with her.

The intimacy of the letters is sometimes surprising. Despite admitting in one early letter that he was a "comparative stranger" to Peggy, he went on to describe a visit to a brothel, although it appears to have been more farcical than lascivious.

Always self-deprecating (he describes his tastes as "distinctly lowbrow", going on to claim that "it is difficult to tell where my hair stops and my eyebrows begin") it is nevertheless clear that he is incredibly grateful for the distraction that Peggy's letters offer. From one camp he writes, "I've had five letters from you today so I am counter-attacking with two letters and a postcard."

Revealing, poignant and at times moving, Mortimer's letters are always entertaining and give a valuable insight into the experiences of a World War II POW. **DS**

USAFE IN THE 1980s

THE US AIR FORCES IN EUROPE AT THE HEIGHT OF THE COLD WAR

Writer: Adrian Symonds **Publisher:** Amberley **Price:** £14.99

The United States Air Force maintained a heavy presence in Europe after the Second World War, and by the 1980s the US Air Forces in Europe (USAFE) were a vast and potent organisation. The 1980s would see a rise in tensions between East and West following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the adoption of a more aggressive stance by the US. For the USAFE, this meant the introduction of new aircraft and weaponry, including laser-guided bombs and land-based cruise missiles. Although the decade would ultimately end in the collapse of the Soviet Union, it would also see combat sorties being flown against an emerging new enemy – international terrorism.

Although it comes with over 140 photographs, this is no mere picture book. The author takes a detailed look at the organisation and equipment of the USAFE, and charts their development over the decade. Included are the 3rd Air Force in the UK, the 16th Air Force across southern Europe from Spain to Turkey, and the 17th Air Force in West Germany. The contributions of the US-based Strategic Air Command (including SR-71 Blackbird and U-2 flights), Military Airlift Command, and Electronic Security Command are also examined. One chapter is dedicated to Operation El Dorado Canyon, the 1986 strikes against Colonel Gaddafi's regime in Libya. **SH**

"ALTHOUGH IT COMES WITH OVER 140 PHOTOGRAPHS, THIS IS NO MERE PICTURE BOOK. THE AUTHOR TAKES A DETAILED LOOK AT THE ORGANISATION AND EQUIPMENT OF THE USAFE, AND CHARTS THEIR DEVELOPMENT"

THE NIMROD

ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE MIGHTY HUNTER

Writer: Martyn Chorlton **Publisher:** Amberley Publishing
Price: £14.99

The Nimrod was one of the Royal Air Force's greatest and most iconic maritime patrol aircraft, in service for over 40 years. Originating in the mid-1950s with the need to replace the propeller-driven Avro Shackleton, the Nimrod was based on the de Havilland Comet airliner. It entered service in 1969 and was only supposed to be an interim solution. Instead, it went on to serve in four variants on operations over home waters and in war zones around the world well into the following century.

As well as the maritime patrol versions, the R.1 variant was a platform capable of intelligence gathering across a range of spectrums. Only in the early 2000s, with the tragic loss of an aircraft over Afghanistan and the spiralling costs of the MRA.4 programme, was the Mighty Hunter finally retired.

Though small, this book is packed with information, and over 140 black and white, and colour photographs and drawings. Beginning with an overview of the procurement and development of the MR.1, the book crams in plenty of technical information but remains highly readable. Subsequent chapters cover the history of the later variants – the R.1, MR.2, and MRA.4. One chapter summaries the operational record of the Nimrod, from the Cod Wars through the long years of maritime patrol from the UK to the Falklands War, and finally to both Gulf Wars and Afghanistan. Full technical specifications and details on squadron service are included. **SH**

5 BEST BOOKS ON

CHURCHILL

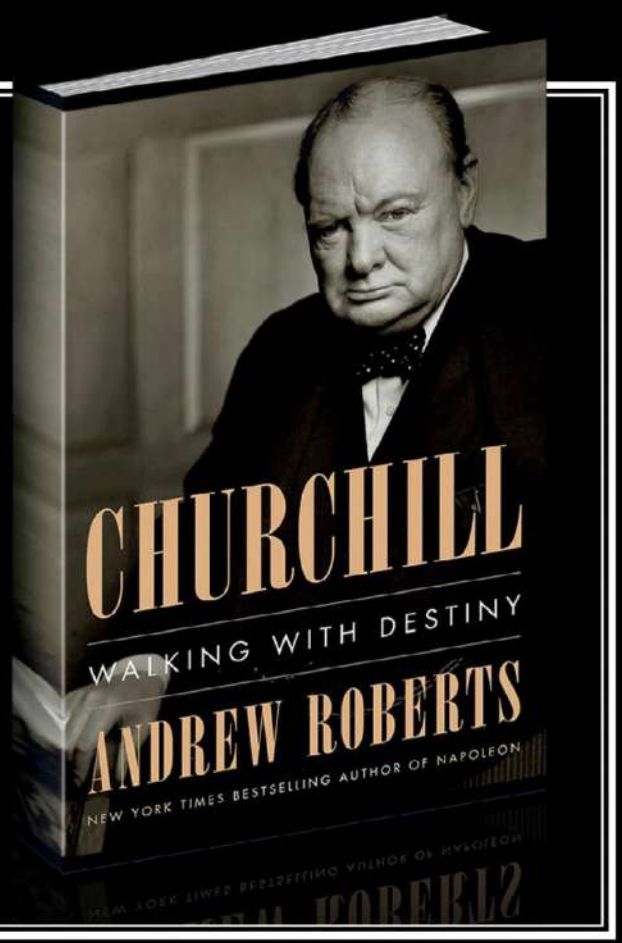
Britain's wartime leader is one of the most celebrated, but at times controversial figures in the nation's history

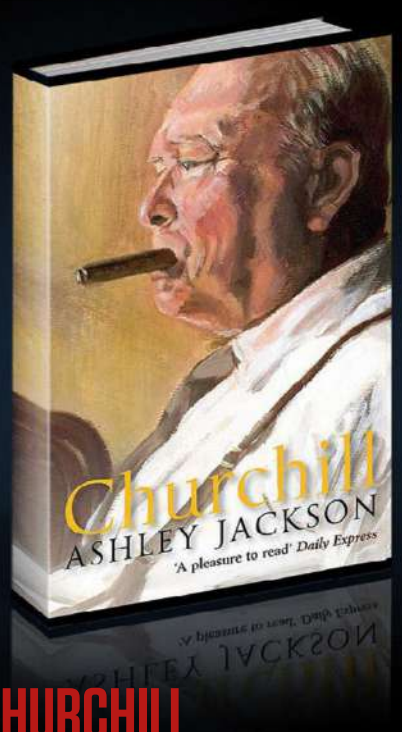
CHURCHILL: WALKING WITH DESTINY

Andrew Roberts

An award-winning, international best seller, Andrew Roberts' single-volume biography is considered to be the definitive account of Britain's iconic leader. Roberts fully delves into the flaws and darker moments of Churchill's leadership, as well as his finest and most challenging moments. Beyond his wartime persona, Roberts also gives a more personal account of Churchill's humour, his habits and passions.

"ROBERTS FULLY DELVES INTO THE FLAWS AND DARKER MOMENTS OF CHURCHILL'S LEADERSHIP"

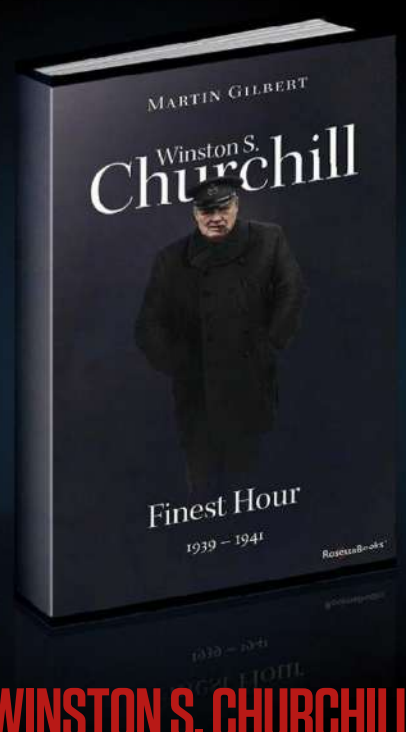




CHURCHILL

Ashley Jackson

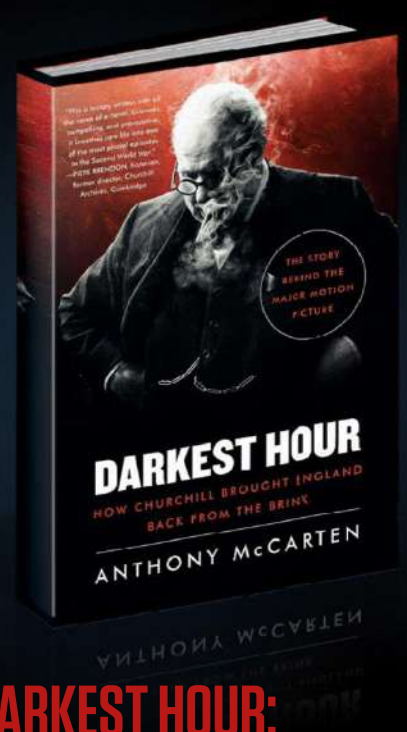
Taking a step back from the public image of the wartime hero, Ashley Jackson approaches Churchill the writer, historian, champion of the British Empire, as well gifted orator and statesman. Investigating criticisms of the leader, during his lifetime as well as since his death, Jackson provides a solid and rounded introduction for those less familiar with Churchill's career.



WINSTON S. CHURCHILL: FINEST HOUR, 1939–1941

Martin Gilbert

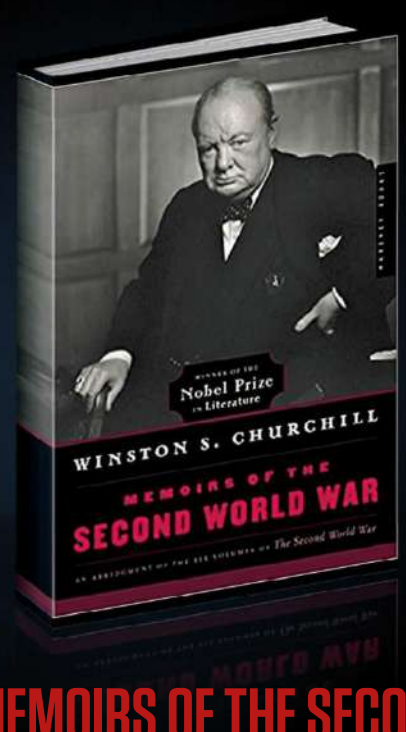
The 'official' biography of Churchill was co-written by his son Randolph and Martin Gilbert, appearing in eight colossal volumes. In addition to this, some 18 companion volumes called the 'Churchill Documents' contain letters, speeches, notes and other primary sources, for the most ardent student of the man.



DARKEST HOUR: HOW CHURCHILL BROUGHT ENGLAND BACK FROM THE BRINK

Anthony McCarten

Anthony McCarten's work focuses on the critical period between Churchill taking office as prime minister, and the moment when the imminent threat of invasion had passed. The book most notably served as the source material for the 2017 movie Darkest Hour, starring Gary Oldman.



MEMOIRS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Winston S. Churchill

After losing the 1945 general election to Labour's Clement Atlee, Churchill set about writing his epic history of the Second World War, which spans the aftermath of the First World War in 1918, to the victory over Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. Many historians have praised the memoir's value as a unique first-hand account from a wartime leader during the conflict .

SOMME TUNIC

This battered WWI service dress was worn by an officer who was severely wounded on the worst day in the history of the British Army

The first day of the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916 is an infamous event in British military history. In a single day, 57,470 British soldiers became casualties as part of the 'Big Push' against German positions in the salient of the River Somme. In the teeth of fierce machine-gun, rifle and artillery fire, troops were cut down in droves with almost 20,000 killed.

One unit that suffered especially high casualties was 2nd Battalion, Duke of Cambridge's Own (Middlesex Regiment) during the attack on 'Mash Valley' near Ovillers-la-Boisselle. Advancing in four waves, its ranks were devastated with all but 51 out of 673 officers and men killed, wounded or missing.

One of the wounded was Captain George Johnson, an experienced Boer War veteran. He was one of the few to reach the second line of German trenches but was forced to retreat with other survivors when his ammunition ran out. Returning to the British trenches after dark, Johnson had been wounded in the chest, pelvis and right forearm. While he was receiving medical attention behind the lines, the right sleeve of his service tunic was cut away before he was evacuated to Britain on 3 July.

Johnson was sent to St Thomas' Hospital in London where he remained until he was passed for light duties at regimental depots. However, his wounds continued to plague him and he required further operations to remove bullet fragments before he was given a war wound pension in July 1917.

Despite his injuries, Johnson remained in the army until 1921 and died in 1968 at the age of 90.

Unlike the standard 1902 Pattern Service Dress tunics for NCOs and privates, the Officers' Service Dress was tailored and used more expensive wool

Source: National Army Museum

NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

Captain Johnson's tunic is held in the collections of the National Army Museum in Chelsea, London.

FOR MORE VISIT: NAM.AC.UK

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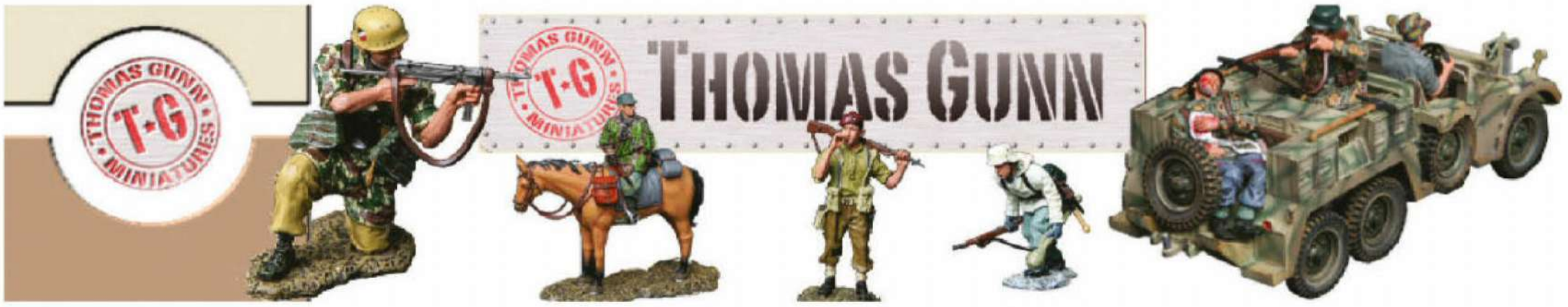

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